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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

COVERING Punjab through its agonies of the last few years, more particularly in the last few crucial months, has been a daunting and demanding journalistic task. As the situation in the troubled state deteriorated, it featured on INDIA TODAY*'s cover no fewer than on six occasions since October 1982. Much of the magazine's extensive coverage was done by Correspondent* SHEKHAR GUPTA *who is no stranger to Punjab or to military action against extremists. He cut his journalist teeth in Punjab as a newspaper correspondent for five years and spent the next three years in the North-east. Since joining* INDIA TODAY *a year ago, Gupta has shuttled between Amritsar and New Delhi to keep track of the ballooning crisis and spent several hours in conversation with the main players in the unfolding tragedy, including Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.*

He reached Amritsar on June 2 shortly after paramilitary forces started exchanging fire with the extremists in the Golden Temple. When he reached the temple, it was obvious that the tension was different from earlier visits. Bhindranwale, ensconced in the Akal Takht, was full of his usual swagger but was obviously under tremendous strain. On seeing a journalist, he exploded: "Many of you write rubbish and for that I have only one treatment," pointing to the ever-present Sten-gun at his side. The extremists, however, seemed equally aware that a siege was imminent. Gupta saw pillboxes being hastily constructed and outside, army units were quietly replacing the paramilitary forces.

Gupta and other journalists were briefly detained by the police before all foreign correspondents and Indians working for the foreign media were ordered to board a police-escorted coach for Ambala. The two Delhi-based correspondents present were given the option of returning or remaining in Amritsar, confined to their hotel. Gupta elected to stay in the knowledge that a major initiative was in the offing. For the next seven days, as the army conducted Operation Bluestar, Amritsar was put under a tightly-controlled curfew. Gupta, however, managed to keep track of the action. From the terrace of his hotel, Amritsar's night sky was alive with tracers and the sounds of battle remained undiminished. On three occasions, Gupta managed to make use of slight curfew relaxations to move out and talk to people involved in the operation. Climbing onto roof-tops overlooking the Golden Temple gave him an exclusive view of the manner in which the operation was conducted and its eventual results.



Correspondent Shekhar Gupta

Finally, with deadline time approaching, Gupta obtained the required permit to make his way out of Punjab. The journey, normally completed in seven hours, took almost 20 as his vehicle was stopped over 100 times by army pickets. For Gupta, who covered the Assam killings last year, the experience was unforgettable. "It's terrible to see your own countrymen dead whether it is in the remote villages of Assam or army jawans and militant Sikhs in Amritsar," he says. Operation Bluestar is clearly one of the biggest media stories of the decade. To obtain a total perspective of the operation, its planning and its effectiveness, and the possible fall-out, INDIA TODAY *commandeered the services of a large number of its staff. Managing Editor* SUMAN DUBEY *met officials and private sources in New Delhi while Principal Correspondent* PRABHU CHAWLA *met President Giani Zail Singh just after his visit to the Golden Temple last week.* RAJU SANTHANAM *travelled to Ganganagar in Rajasthan when rumours of a section of jawans revolting was heard.* K. BHANUMATHI *and Photographer* PRAMOD PUSHKARNA *travelled through Haryana to Chandigarh to gauge the reactions in the area and join up with Chandigarh Correspondent* GOBIND THUKRAL *who filed valuable input on the operation. Photo Editor* RAGHU RAI *was in Amritsar when the army first moved in and managed to capture some of the drama and tension there. Correspondents in other states filed reactions to the temple crack-down. Putting together all this, Gupta wrote this fortnight's cover story. Tragically it is likely to be the first on the new phase of the Punjab crisis.*

Cidade de Goa Congratulates Charles Correa

The Royal Gold Medal for Architecture was awarded this year to Indian architect Charles Correa for his vision, planning and execution of new townships, buildings and hotels in India.

And unique among his masterpieces are Cidade de Goa in Goa and Bay Island in the Andaman Islands.

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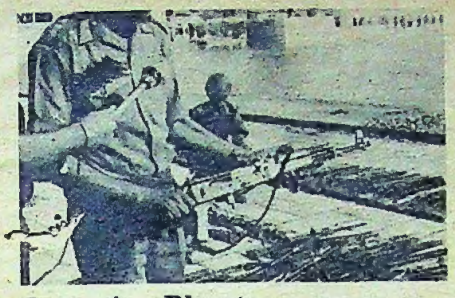
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HRH the Prince of Wales presented the award to Charles Correa on 30th May 1984 in London.

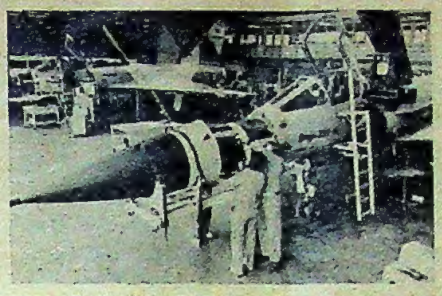
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Operation Bluestar

The lightning army raid on the Golden Temple left Bhindranwale, hundreds of his followers and armymen dead. With Sikh sentiments running high and reconciliation an improbability, the country is poised at a dangerous turning point.

COVER STORY 18



The Mirage Minuet

Last fortnight the first Mirage-2000 built for the Indian Air Force glided out from Dassault-Breguet's plant in France. Yet Dassault seemed apprehensive over Russia wooing India to buy their MiG-29, offering them stiff competition.

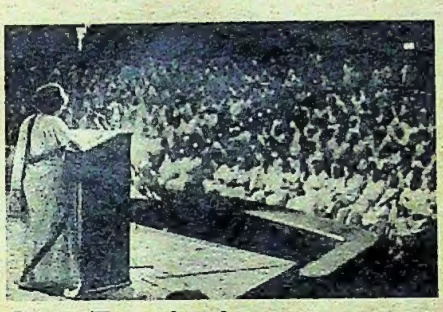
DEFENCE 126



Mistress of Murder

A fortnight after the massacre at Astha village in Uttar Pradesh, the carnage seems to have left behind surprisingly mild after-effects. It has, however, given rise to yet another bandit queen, Kusma Nain, 23, the perpetrator of the murders.

CRIME 134



Cross Examination

Last fortnight, the Congress(I) completed an elaborate convention of its district-level leaders and four frontal organisations. The 2,500 delegates participating in it were 'interviewed' by a panel in a bid to formulate the party's poll strategy.

CURRENT EVENTS 32



Rising Militancy

The Konda Reddis, a tribe which inhabits the hilly tracts of Andhra Pradesh have risen in arms, aided by Naxalites, against age-old exploitation by forest contractors. The Government's efforts to improve things have borne little fruit.

SPECIAL FEATURE 130



A Sponsored Success

With Doordarshan's relaxed sponsorship guidelines, corporate entities are getting onto the sponsorship bandwagon, realising its power and profitability. Assorted private firms are also probing the viability of producing programmes for television.

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Cover photograph by RAGHU RAI



RAJAJI FACTOR

The cover story (June 15) was a well reasoned out and well documented essay. However, I would like to point out that C. Rajagopalachari was not "keen", as the author put it, to form government. The position was that the Congress Party was on the verge of collapse and the party, at the initiative of C. Subramaniam persuaded Nehru to agree to draft Rajaji for the leadership of the party. Rajaji accepted the offer in that sickening atmosphere of factious politics and economical chaos because he regarded it as a call of duty.

Madras — T.A. KRISHNAMURTY

■ Nehru had described Rajaji as "...much wiser than I, much more experienced than I...one of the wisest men...". In intellect, statesmanship, administrative ability, scholarship and hard-headed realism, Rajagopalachari was much superior to Nehru, though not a beloved figure. Had he ruled, India's poverty wouldn't have been so acute.

Gauhati — K.G. BHATTACHARYA

DANGEROUS DRIFT

The interview with Bal Thackeray (June 15) reveals that he is one of those people who can only instigate workers and cannot control them. If he thinks he can promote Hinduism by resorting to riots, he is living in a pipe-dream. It is fortunate that our nation is still integrated, in spite of fanatics like Bal Thackeray. The Hindus of India are more secular than him.

Madras — H. MOHAMED JAN

■ People like Bal Thackeray, who destroy the peace of our country, should be dealt with strongly by the Government. His speeches are indications of his intentions of disintegrating the nation and his support of separatist elements.

Patna — MD ANWAR ALAM QUMAISPURI

DIRECTORS' ACTOR

The cover story (May 31) on the big-budget films came as a pleasant change after the numerous stories on the death and destruction in Punjab. The films that Prakash Mehra and Manmohan Desai make may be trash as far as its relation to reality is concerned, but at least they provide the kind of entertainment the general public is looking for.

Delhi — RAJIV HANDIA

■ Mehra and Desai think they can pass everything inane and mindless in the name of "mass taste".

Satara — SUNIL MALGAVA

■ One didn't expect a magazine of your class to stoop to the level of an ordinary film magazine, glorifying the three symbols of Hindi cinema's crass commercialism — Manmohan Desai, Prakash Mehra and Amitabh Bachchan. Desai proudly claims that he packs in so much action that the viewer gets no time to think. This clearly shows that his films are meant for the illiterate, unthinking, naive and gullible people.

Kalady, Kerala — PRAKASH PARAYATH

■ The cover story has shown the greatness of the two extraordinary directors, but the credit for the success of their films goes to the longest thing on two legs on our silver screen — Amitabh Bachchan.

Quilon, Kerala — BIJU OOMMEN JOY

THE SINDRI SHIFT

Your article on PDIL ("Resistance Moves", May 31) has a few factual inaccuracies. The proposed transfers from Sindri to the company's Baroda and Delhi offices relate not to "half" the numbers presently located at Sindri but, to only some 139 engineers and draftsmen, constituting less than one-third of Sindri's strength in various functional engineering disciplines. Even after the proposed moves, Sindri would house nearly 50 per cent of the engineering resources of PDIL.

It is not true to say that the company is being "gradually done in" (presumably as a result of government policy). For the next series of gas-based fertiliser projects PDIL will be co-contractors (not sub-contractors) for ammonia, and prime contractors for urea. Also, PDIL catalyst sales have more than doubled and order books are full. What PDIL needs is modernisation of its catalyst plant at Sindri so that we can fulfil our commitments. One 1,350 tpd stream of ammonia plant at Thal Vaishet will be commissioned early next year with PDIL's catalysts in service. This would not have been possible without the Government's support.

Sindri, Bihar — N.N. JHA, *public relations officer*, PDIL

While the immediate transfers of staff will not amount to half the total, the effect of this plus earlier transfers will mean that half the engineers and draftsmen will now be out of Sindri. The Government's step-motherly treatment of PDIL *is well-known in fertiliser industry circles, and our report referred to a feeling among the staff that the company is being "gradually done in". This can hardly be disputed in the light of recent events at Sindri. Also,* PDIL *was supposed to be the prime contractors (and not a co-contractor) for the next series of ammonia plants.*

As for catalyst orders, PDIL *experts told our correspondent that orders that could have been met by the company went to foreign firms instead. In fact rival manufacturing facilities are now proposed to be set up in the country.*

— Editor

TEMPLE NEGLECT

The ancient temples are symbols of our glorious past (May 31). If today we fail to protect and preserve them, we will stand guilty in the court of history for breach of faith. The generations to come will only remember us as incompetent fools. The present state of affairs in Tamil Nadu is indicative of the regard that the Government has for these places.

Bangalore — P.B. RAMESH

■ Temples are places of worship and their sanctity should be preserved at all costs. It is depressing that politicians are spreading their tentacles even into the sanctum sanctorum of temples in Tamil Nadu. It is the duty of any sensible government to maintain the temples and not allow arrack shops to be set up.

Trivandrum — E.P. CHANDRALEKHA

PRIVILEGED PRESS

In the article "Press Hand-outs" (May 31), one salient fact emerges: if you can't beat them, then buy them. Sripat Misra seems to be using the carrot technique, a move that will pay rich dividends for him as well as for his party. Nothing in

this world is given free with no strings attached, and the journalists of Lucknow are no exception. Will these very journalists take advantage of this situation and thereby write unbiased reports?

Bombay Y.M. DAVER

■ Misra's move to provide housing for journalists is a heartening move. I hope chief ministers of other states also take the cue from Misra and provide the much-needed shelter for struggling journalists. I am aware that the chief minister is accused of procuring land from villagers without paying adequate compensation, but I am sure in due course he will set that right.

Calcutta PARITOSH BATABYAL

HOLLOW POLICY

In your article on foreign trade (May 31), you have done well to expose the hollowness of the Government's import-export policy. The present policy of liberalised imports has made the country a dumping ground of foreign discarded and surplus goods. In no item is this more glaring than in the import of books. Though the policy specifies that only high level scientific and academic works can be imported under OGL, however, book importers are importing only discards — including pornography — under OGL. The Government is aware of this abuse, yet no checks are considered necessary. No wonder Indian businessmen find it hard to remain in business.

New Delhi VINOD KUMAR

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

This is with reference to your Comment on the presidential system (May 31). I had some discussion with V.M. Tarkunde, president of People's Union for Civil Liberties, on his visit to Shillong. I agreed with him when he stated that "people got the government they deserved". I only said that in our country the people had no chance to get the government they deserve. This is because they have not been given the right and responsibility to elect their government.

I was finance minister in 1972, chief minister in 1979 and 1983. The people of my constituency and for that matter, the people of Meghalaya, had never elected me to be so. Similarly, the people of India had not elected Jawaharlal Nehru or Lal Bahadur Shastri or Indira Gandhi or Morarji Desai or Charan Singh to be their prime ministers. There has never been an election of government by the people. What the people do is only to elect a person to the legislature to make laws and to serve them in their small area called a constituency.

To my proposal for a direct popular election of government by the people with a view to build a sense of oneness as a nation, Mr Tarkunde remarked that the same purpose could be served if instead of electing "a person" the people may be called to elect "a party" to form the Government. I am inclined to agree with him if the elected party can democratically select/elect to form the ministry. In fact, in my small party, the APHLC, we had evolved such a procedure in 1983 whereby a leader was elected not by the MLA's alone but by a board consisting of about 75 party leaders including the MLA's (Meghalaya Assembly has 60 MLA's).

The trouble was that there was no way to prevent the elected leader or his MLA colleagues crossing the floor and leaving the party helpless. Hence anti-defection laws should go together with such a system. The party should have the authority to remove or withdraw any member from the Government or the legislature. I have submitted a six-point memorandum to the Centre-state Relations Commission, one of which was regarding the present political system.

B.B. LYNGDOH, MLA
leader of opposition,
Shillong *Meghalaya Legislative Assembly*

MINING TROUBLE

The "Gujral Gamble" (May 15) was thought-provoking. All credit goes to Mr Gujral for pushing up production. But there is another side to the story. Under Mr Gujral's pressure to achieve increased targets, the nervous colliery administration has been indulging in reckless mining, with consumers like thermal power stations getting huge boulders and stones. The workers are being pressed to work at night and on holidays; those failing to do so are being threatened with punitive fines and salary cuts.

Also, the coal stocks are mounting at pitheads because of the production drive. In the intense summer heat, this leads to spontaneous combustion and widespread burning of coal. In the north Karanpura area of Central Coalfields, 7 lakh tonnes out of a stock of 17 lakh tonnes of pithead stocks are on fire. I hope Mr Gujral will give adequate importance to these problems too.

J.D. MALHOTRA
chief engineer (thermal),
Bhatinda *Guru Nanak Dev Thermal Power Station*

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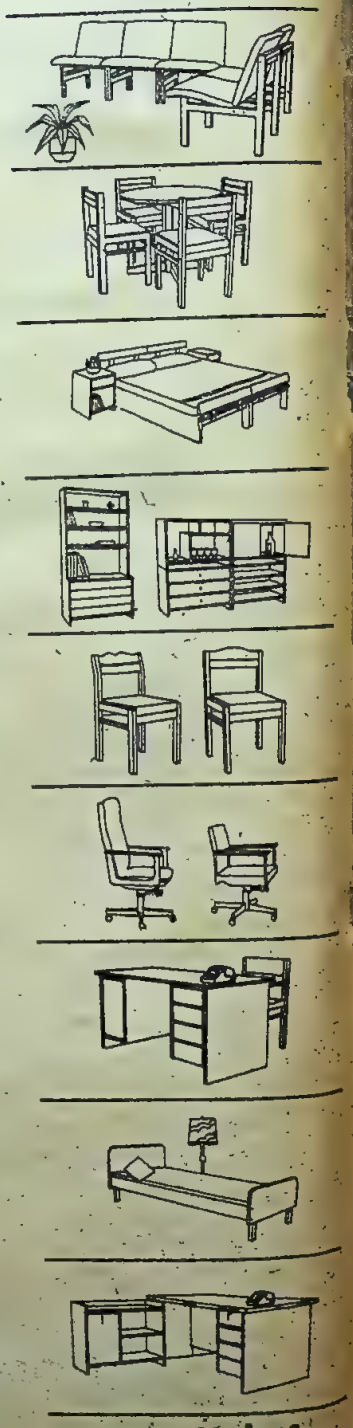
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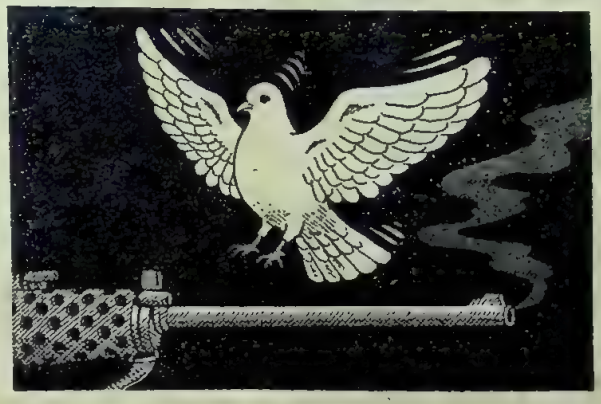
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The Lessons of Punjab

INDIA will be a long time chewing and digesting the lesson of Punjab. The use of the army in storming the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines-turned-fortresses, the unprecedented immobilisation of the whole state, the loss of several hundred lives, the deep anguish among the country's 15 million or so Sikhs, the very fact that it came to such a pass — all this embodies the problem of Punjab with a frightening importance unsurpassed, probably, by any other of independent India's periodic crises. What has occurred in Punjab over the last fortnight and the last four years is a painful experience in which there are no victors or vanquished. It is also an experience which few nations can find the strength and resilience to relive a second time, and it enjoins upon the people of the country, no less than the Government to ensure that it is not repeated, that the likes of Bhindranwale do not surface again, in any form, in any religion or in any community.



Even as events in Punjab move into their second phase, the death of Bhindranwale and the extermination of his band of extremists having ended the first, two early lessons need to be driven home. The first is that religion and politics can only come together in an explosive mixture. True, Sikh politics has always had its foundations in the Sikh religion, but Bhindranwale's version of both was a gross distortion of the tradition. This lesson has a much wider importance, however: it is merely coincidental that it should be the action of Sikh extremists that call attention to it. The sad truth is that the ideals represented by the content of secularism have been eroded, all too often deliberately, since they were first pronounced at the time of Independence. Individuals who preach hatred, who build walls between communities and religions, leaders who see an easy vote in the emphasis of narrow religious ends, who openly heap abuse on other communities — such people are no longer fringe elements, they are all too easily becoming part of mainstream politics. The result of this is not just the Punjab terrorists or the Bhiwandi riots, to take the most recent examples, but the break-up of society into competitive enclaves and the sparks that fly every time there is friction between any two.

The second lesson is more tangible, that indecision in coping with social and political problems or any attempt to milk them for political advantage merely encourages them to deteriorate swiftly from manageable to unamanageable proportions. The history of the Punjab agitation and the terrorism unleashed in its wake abounds with lost opportunities and political miscalculations. This emboldened the extremists in pursuing their charted path even more vigorously to the point where they, and not the politicians, were calling the shots. The breakdown of the administration and the law and order machinery was then an inevitable corollary.

These home truths point to some clearly defined objectives in the handling of Punjab in the coming months. The first is that the army has to see its operation through to the end. That means no let-up in the search for terrorists and for caches of arms, the gentle application, so to speak, of a fine tooth comb, before the state can be returned to civilian administration. But the emphasis must be not only on thoroughness, it must be on speed. The longer the task takes, the greater the risk of friction between the army and the public. It would be an immeasurable tragedy if the army were to be bogged down in Punjab the way it has been in the North-east.

The second immediate objective is to close the yawning chasm that has been opened between the Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab. Much of the Sikh resentment against the Government's action rests on the belief that invasion of the temples is a greater sacrilege than their conversion into fortified sanctuaries for terrorists and killers. On the other side of the coin, any tendency on the part of the Hindus to see this as a triumph would be foolish and dangerous. At the moment with curfew blanketing it, there are only stray and probably unreliable indications of the mood of the state. But as the restrictions are gradually eased and people are able to express themselves, it will fall on the political and religious leaders of both communities to start the long healing process.

Finally, whatever the Government has done in the last fortnight, it has not addressed the underlying political problem which remains as it was. Predictably, the clearing of the temples has deprived the Government of any Akali leader who is at the moment able or even willing to resume the dialogue. But by breaking the back of the terrorists, it has established that lawful government will not be blackmailed by violence and arms. But the Government must now be magnanimous. And decisively so. Without being apologetic, it must adopt a more flexible approach to the political issues than in the past. If not now, then as soon as possible it must resume the initiative to build bridges with the Sikh leadership, as well as assuage public feelings.

The experience in Punjab has been traumatic and the solution that the Government opted for has opened wounds that will take a considerably long time in healing, and leave scars that may not disappear. The storming of the temple was only a means, however distasteful, and not an end in itself. All the more reason that it deal firmly and well in time with potential trouble-makers; that it act fairly and justly, and be recognised at large, and most certainly by the Sikhs, as doing so. If it doesn't, not only will the lesson of Punjab be lost, Indian unity and the spirit of tolerance may be lost.

LET'S RAISE THE CURTAIN ON WHY NEWSPAPERS' PRICES HAVE BEEN GOING UP AND WHY THEY MIGHT RISE EVEN HIGHER.

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Bad 'noose' for newspapers

Take a close look at these taxes and imposts which cut against the very basis of a newspaper's existence.

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A duty on import of printing equipment and consumables, ranging from 40 to 150%.

And the 20% disallowance on advertising expenditure introduced by the budget of 1983, which has brought about a substantial fall in the sale of advertising space. Because the Government thinks advertising is 'wasteful' and 'avoidable'.

It is easy to see where all this will lead to.

Newspapers will be obliged to raise their selling price, which will result in a loss of circulation.

Reduced circulation will further bring down the advertising revenue earned. Which will then have to be made up for by another increase in price

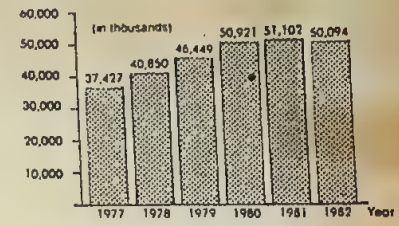
The end-result of this spiral will soon make the newspaper a luxury and push it out of the consumer's reach.

And all for a negligible amount of revenue, which the Government aims to bring in by these measures.

Hurdles in the way of the free flow of information

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that since 1980, newspaper circulation figures in the country have shown a clear downward trend.

Circulation of Newspapers



Source : The office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, New Delhi.

What's more, while the desired newspapers-to-population ratio for developing countries is 100 copies per 1,000 people*, in India this stands at a mere 13 per 1,000.

In fact, what is surprising is that these measures have been enacted by a Government which is committed to the free flow of information and the spread of universal literacy.

Think...

How many times must a newspaper raise its price, to continue being a viable proposition? And, were it to do so, would it still reach as many people as it has been doing till now?

Is advertising 'wasteful' or 'avoidable'?

Or do such definitions apply to these measures which make it impossible for newspapers to reach the people, at a price they can easily afford?

Yes. Think about these questions. The issues involved are of the utmost importance.

*UNESCO recommendations

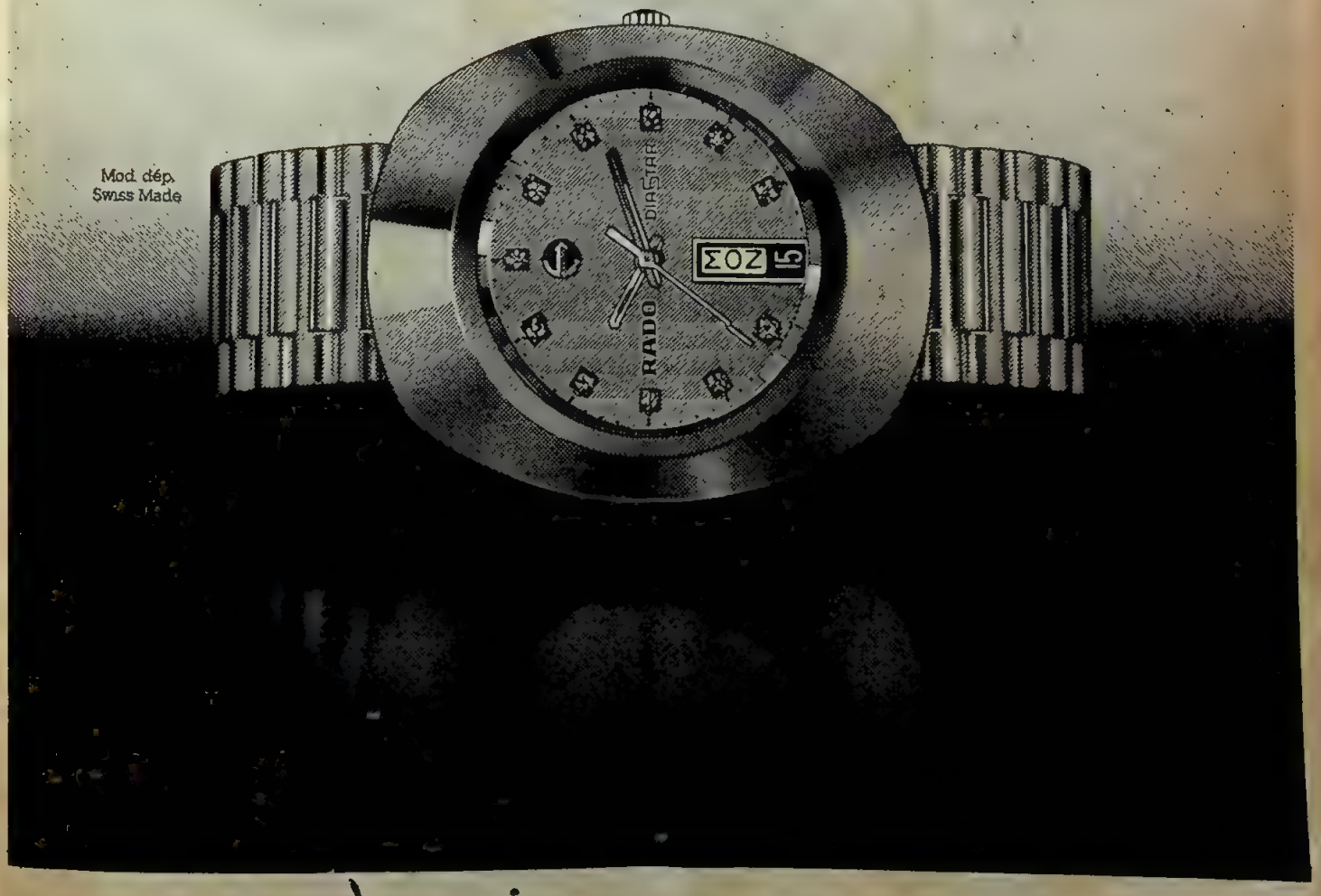
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• *There is no such thing as the Congress high command. I wonder who is supposed to be in the high command?*

■ RAJIV GANDHI *quoted in The Week*

• *Rajiv Gandhi is sober and knowledgeable and by far the best candidate for prime minister after Mrs Gandhi.*

■ H.K.L. BHAGAT *in an interview by a US television station*

• *Religion comes not from observing rites and rituals, but from righteousness. Helping others. As for leftist dogma, this is all Coca-Cola. Effervescent revolution. Plenty of slogans. But when it comes to real issues — nothing.*

■ BABA AMTE *in The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *Everybody in West Bengal is waiting for "godot"... Delay has become a general disease.*

■ ASHOK MITRA *at a function in Calcutta*

• *I don't really know Indian politics. But it's always nice when someone behaves very badly and then when she comes back in power — she's much better.*

■ RICHARD WEST, *British journalist in Imprint*

• *He (Farooq Abdullah) had been acting like a dictator. He tried to obliterate every sign and symbol of our father... He expelled all the senior colleagues of Papa (Sheikh Abdullah), giving the impression that Papa was heading a bunch of thieves...*

■ BEGUM KHALIDA SHAH *in Patriot*

• *As an actor I can identify with the people's real life problems more easily than an ordinary person... I am an actor... I want to die acting.*

■ SIVAJI GANESAN *in Filmfare*

• *I have seen porn films. But I cannot make out what is a soft-porn film.*

■ I.V. SASI *in Weekend Review*

• *Some films take a stand against western influence — call it pervert and at the same time exploit it by showing buttocks and bosoms. This is dishonest, criminal.*

■ VIJAY TENDULKAR *in The Sunday Observer*

• *Yes, my wife is a flirt... So what? She (Moon Moon Sen) is very flirtatious and full of endearments and kisses for everybody... she can never be the typical namasteji kind of wife!*

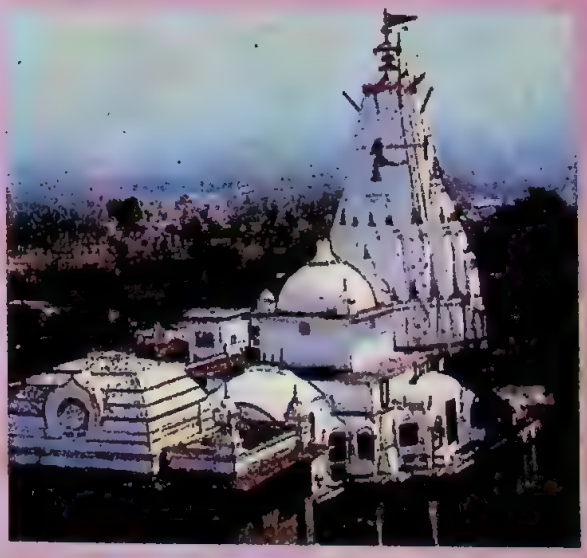
■ BHARAT DEV VERMA *in Stardust*

• *Attenborough's Gandhi possibly did some good to the sick western society. For the gun-flashing sections of Indians, even the screen Mahatma has become irrelevant today.*

■ HARI JAISINGH *in Indian Express*

DISCOVERING HIMACHAL-IV





HIMACHAL'S RELIGIONS

Himachal—the traditional land of gods—is popularly known as the valley of a thousand deities and temples. The Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh is worshipped throughout the valley. A number of temples are dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Shiva. But, far more widespread is the worship of Shiva and his consort Parvati or Devi—the incarnation of Shakti. She is worshipped as Durga, Uma, Chamunda, Jwala, etc. Also revered as gods are Ganesh, Hanuman, Vedic Rishis and Munis, Naag Devta, etc.

A visit to the temples spread all over Himachal evokes a great sense of serenity, sanctity and antiquity. The temple architecture is of varied shapes and designs—the main styles being PAGODA, CHALET, SHIKHARA and indigenous PAHARI. The prominent places of pilgrimage are: Jwalamukhi, Naina Devi, Bajreshwari Devi, Chamunda Devi, Baijnath, Paonta Sahib, Hatkoti Manikaran, Narayan Temples of Baragarh, Tarapur, Hadimba Temples etc.





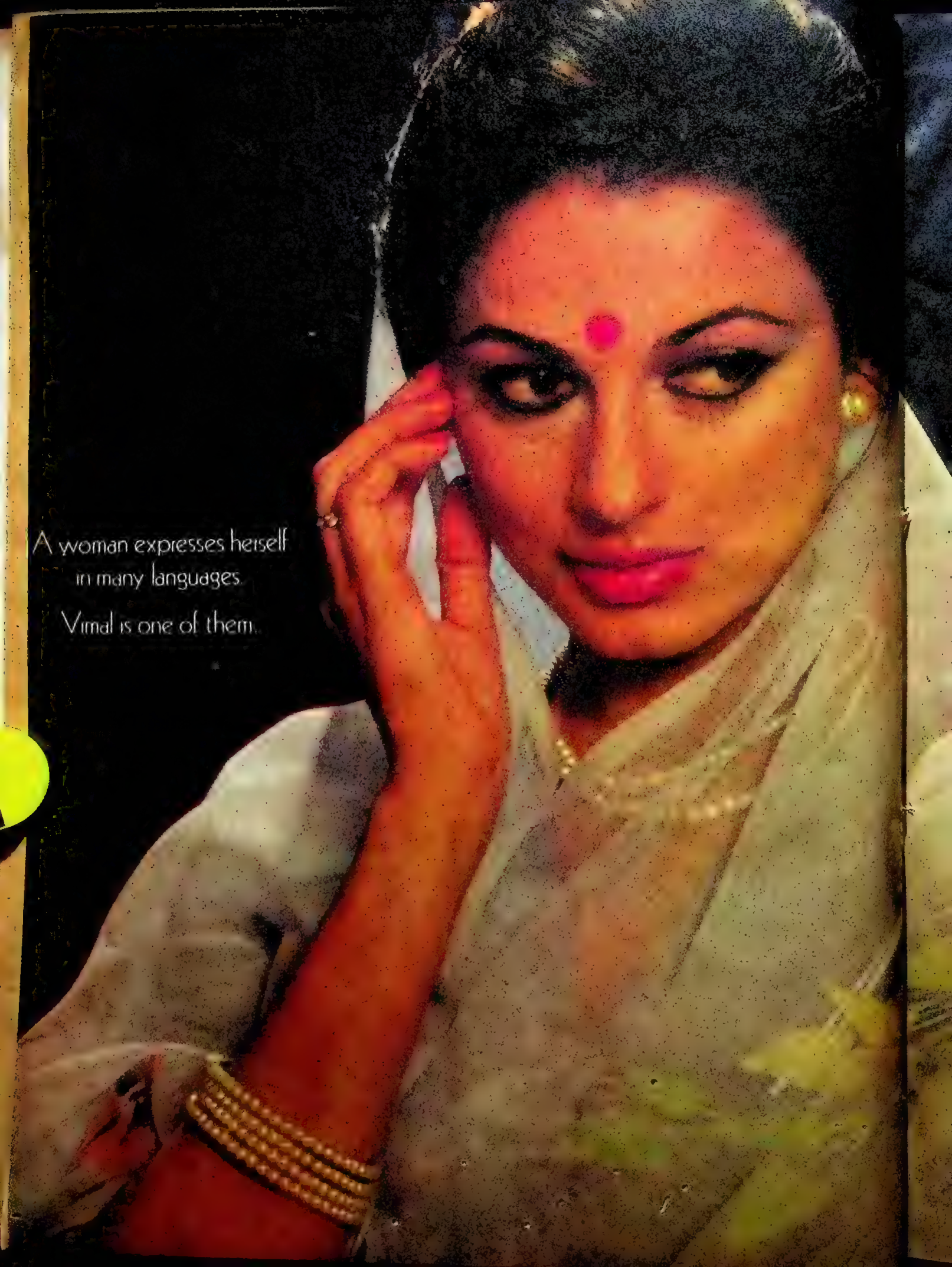
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HELPING HAND



■ Traffic policemen are supposed to have a series of red, amber and green lights in place of a heart, given the excruciating monotony of their job, but there is one in Bombay who has his left ventricle in the right place.

At a busy crossroads near Worli Naka a milk vendor stumbled and spilled a huge can of milk. He managed to retrieve what was left in the can but there was still a large amount flowing down the road. The policeman on duty was about to blow his whistle to allow the traffic to move on when he noticed a thin little kitten move timidly onto the road to lap at the milk. That was enough to keep the whistle in his mouth unblown and the traffic straining at the leash a few yards away unmoved.

The traffic lights changed once, twice and finally three times: but still the kitten crouched in the middle of the road taking in all the milk it could; and still the policeman, unmindful of horns and threats, stood next to it with his whistle clenched between his teeth. Only when the kitten had taken its final lap and jumped to safety on the pavement with a final flick of its wet whiskers did the policeman blow the whistle, his good deed for the day done.

BUS BRAWL

■ There is a rule of thumb which goes down very well with people who do not like others to have what they have. Of course, in the narrow-minded process, they end up having nothing at all, but the principle's the thing. Ask the village of Sundholi, near Belgaum in Karnataka.

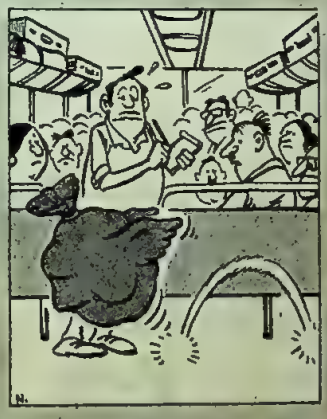
In its efforts to provide transport in the countryside the state Government had decided to start a bus travelling from Gokak to Bhairnatti taking in Sundholi on the way. The Sundholi people learnt that they were just a 'via' on the route and did not like it at all: they proposed that the bus terminate at Sundholi and the Bhairnatti people could walk. To ensure that the state Government agreed to their request, they gheraoed



the bus when it arrived at Sundholi and wouldn't let it carry on to Bhairnatti.

The Bhairnatti villagers marched up to Sundholi and told the driver to take the bus to their village. The inevitable session of stone-throwing began between the two groups. The result was that the bus stopped going to both villages. And now, both Sundholi and Bhairnatti walk.

FARE FIGHT



■ Common sense, it is said, is the sixth and the best of all senses. It cannot be defined, but can be demonstrated as a traveller did.

He was sitting in an inter-city bus in Kerala, on the Palghat-Madurai route. Among his luggage was a shapeless cloth bag packed with vegetables, fruits and a choice gift for the married daughter whom he was going to spend the week-end with. As the bus hurtled through the Kerala countryside in the night, the choice gift could stand the jolting and the bumping no longer and began emitting squawks. The conductor armed himself with his ticket book and his leaky ball-point pen to confront his client.

Rules were on his side: animals had to be charged the full fare and he asked the traveller to shell out Rs 12. The farmer clutched on to his by now frantic gift and declined. The conductor grimly wrote out a ticket and brandished it at the farmer. The reaction was swift: he opened the bag, pulled the hen out, and flung it out of the window, common sense dictating that it was no use paying Rs 12 to transport something worth half that.

DONKEY DEBATE

■ If radio and television are ever allowed into elected assemblies, they should make a beeline for the Bhopal Municipal Council. Last fortnight, it spent 15 minutes discussing the fate of a donkey which for some odd reason had been "arrested" and kept in custody by the corporation staff.

Madhu Gargava of the Congress(I) began it all by asking the standing committee and the commissioner what was to be done about the donkey: the animal cannot be auctioned off as it will have to fetch more than what has been spent on it—Rs 1,000—and nobody was willing to pay so much. One thing led to another with members wondering how the news had been leaked, calling for an enquiry and demanding that the committee resign because of

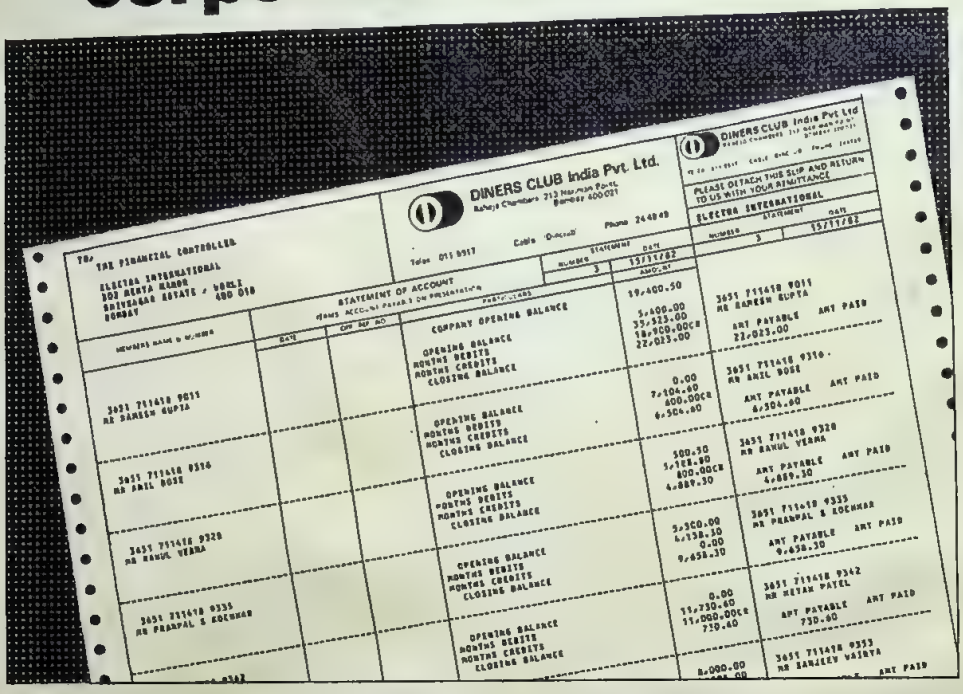


the breach of secrecy.

Gargava got quite emotional about the whole affair. Others, less emotional, suggested that the standing committee chairman and the commissioner be taken around town on the donkey as they had failed to rehabilitate it. Meanwhile, an official said that the animal had been freed, preserving the honourable members' image.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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Crackdown in Punjab

Operation Bluestar



NO DECISION could have been more painful, more fraught with tragic consequences, than the one to launch Operation Bluestar. And yet, it was a denouement that was somehow inevitable. For close to three bloody years, Mrs Gandhi's Government had dithered and dallied as the extremist threat emanating from the Golden Temple, the most sacred symbol of Sikhism and the seat of its religious power, had acquired monstrous proportions. From here, hit-lists had been cold-bloodedly drawn up and death squads dispatched to wreak their deadly havoc—all master-minded by the malevolent figure of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. For three long years, the chanting of the gurbani had been punctuated by the staccato bursts of gunfire as the extremists carried out summary executions or exchanged fire with security forces. And now, pushed to the wall, Mrs Gandhi finally did what few could deny had to be done: she gave the signal for Operation Bluestar —the biggest and most significant counter-terrorist action undertaken anywhere in the world.

The contingency had been long anticipated even though Operation Bluestar, the code name for the army's move into Punjab against terrorists, was put together in an incredibly short time. In Chakrata, commandos had trained on a large scale replica of the Golden Temple. Consultations were held with the army with increasing frequency and by end-May, when the death-toll from extremist activity rose alarmingly, the decision was made. The signs were evident. In the dark of the night, starting May 30, camouflaged army convoys of the famed 9 Infantry Division based at Meerut started converging on Amritsar and other key towns in Punjab.

President Zail Singh cancelled a visit to the North-east and Army Chief General A.S.Vaidya was hurriedly recalled from Srinagar. In Amritsar itself, the signals were even clearer. Paramilitary forces had been strengthened around the temple and heavy exchanges of fire with the extremists, some lasting seven continuous hours, took place with the obvious intention of letting the extremists expend ammunition and reveal their newly-fortified positions. At 9 p.m. on June 1, curfew was clamped on the holy city. Within 24 hours, nearly 70,000 troops culled from the crack fighting formations of the army and paramilitary forces had taken up predetermined positions in the streets of Punjab and fanned out along the thousands of kilometres of roads that link the 12,168 villages in the state.

RAGHU RAI

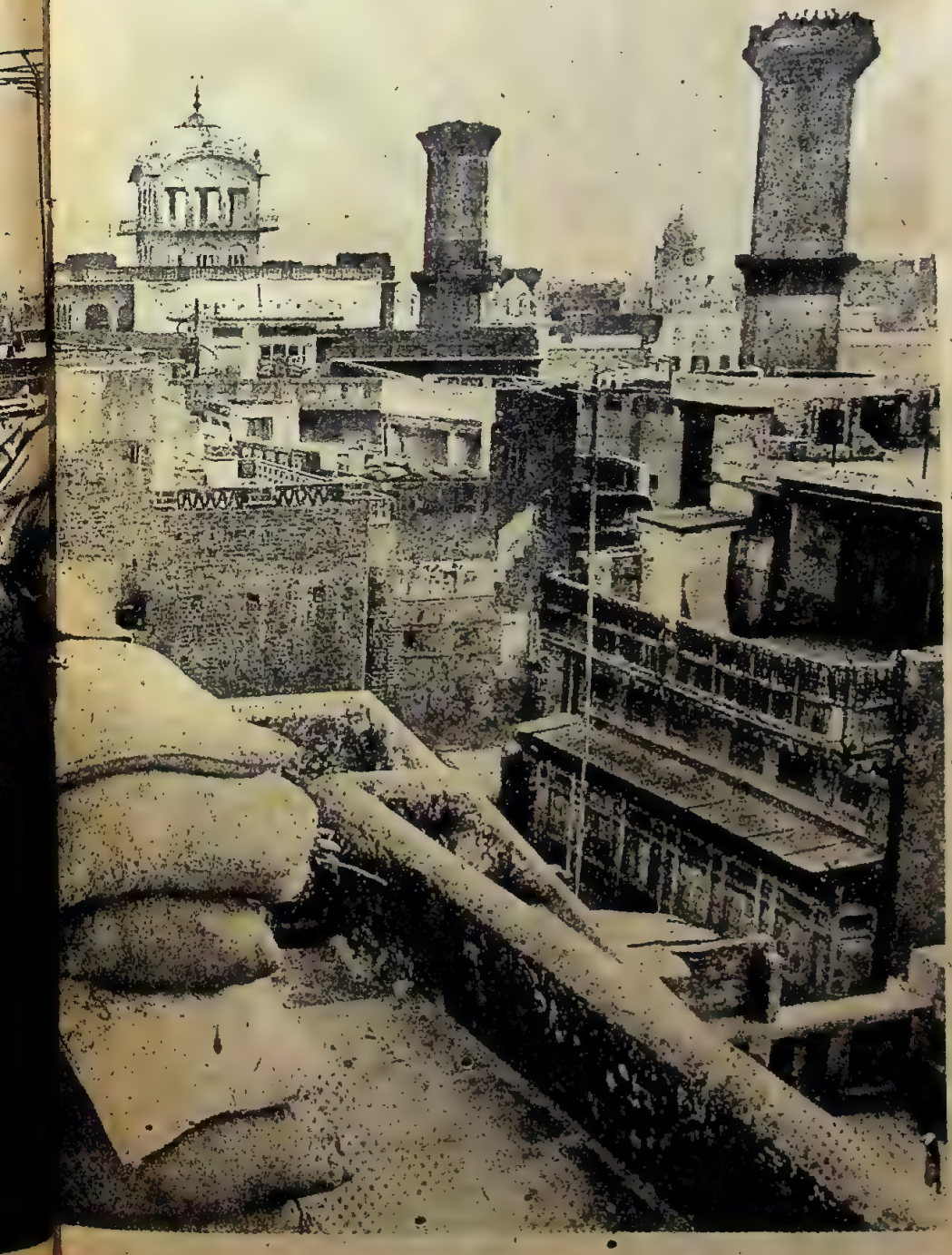


CRPF jawans keeping guard from a battlement facing the Golden Temple

From then, events moved with bewildering rapidity. On the evening of June 2, Mrs Gandhi went on the air in a nation-wide television broadcast to declare that the Government would put down terrorism and violence in the state and appealed to the Akali leaders to withdraw their agitation planned for the next day to stop movement of grain. She also outlined the framework of a settlement that could be reached on the Punjab problem and asked the Akali Dal to accept it.

But it was clear that the die had been cast. Simultaneously, in a series of ordinances, the Government banned the entry of foreigners into Punjab, the state governor made an official request to the Centre to call in the army, the media was gagged, rail, road and air services suspended all over the state, and all communication channels snapped. Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dayal, a Sikh, chief of staff, western command, was brought in as security adviser to the governor of Punjab.

The same ruthless efficiency was evident in the way the army laid siege to the temple, initially in the form of the 12th battalion of the Bihar Regiment. Officer-led patrols reconnoitered the area while others armed with automatic rifles and light machine-guns (LMG's) scaled roof-tops to join the CRPF and BSF men on their sandbagged pickets overlooking the temple. By the evening, however, the strategy had changed. The army commanders realised that the roof-top positions were much too vulnerable to grenade attacks from the extremist pillboxes atop tall 18th century towers and a water tank inside the temple complex.



The Biharis decided to set up new positions behind sandbagged windows in vacated houses. Men from the Garhwal Regiment and Brigade of Guards joined in a similar exercise later in the evening on the other sides of the temple. Almost mechanically, patrols went about in a business-like fashion led by officers carrying binoculars, maps and notebooks, setting up machine-gun emplacements, high-perched bivouacs and sealing off the routes of ingress or escape. Simultaneously, tanks rolled into sensitive villages leading patrols assigned the task of preventing communal killings.

The sequence of events

June 3: By late night, the whole state had been tightly secured. While the alert Biharis watched the area around the clock- tower, the main entrance to the temple and Brahm Buta Market—the extremist stronghold facing the entrance to the serai area—the Garhwalis, the Guardsmen and the Punjabis sealed the other escape routes round Chowk Parag Dass, Chhatti Khui, Atta Mandi, Baba Atal and Buddhi Lutt Bazaar. But the intention was not yet to strike—even at this late stage the army had determined it would be a psychological war, hoping that the build-up might soften the extremists' resolve. Officers went on loud-hailers asking them to surrender peacefully and avoid a blood-bath. There was no immediate response, but later the warnings were greeted with automatic fire.

Still operating on the psychological level, the jawans responded with long bursts on extremist battlements to give them a foretaste of what a frontal battle with the army could be like. But this failed to be of any deterrent value. Quick to respond, the extremists made their intentions clear around midnight, lobbing grenades and maintaining a heavy fusillade with medium machine-guns (MMG's)—perched atop the towers and water tank, each capable of firing over 60 rounds per second.

June 4: By the morning, it had dawned on the army brass that they faced a determined insurgent army charged

with religious fervour and not an armed rabble as they were sometimes contemptuously dismissed as. A high-level decision was taken to deal with them "effectively", starting with the visible fortifications in the shape of pillboxes. The army brought in recoilless guns mounted on jeeps firing small but highly penetrative shells.

But if the officers had initially underestimated the fighting resolve of the extremists, they seemed to have miscalculated the strength of concrete in the bunkers and pillboxes as well, and the army soon realised it would need to use stronger firepower. They brought in 3.87cm mountain guns, powerful weapons with a short range but deadly accuracy, and the venerable 25-pounders. Recalls an artillery officer: "This indeed was the trickiest part of the operation. The temple is surrounded by extremely tall residential houses that give no clearing for gun emplacements. The temple complex itself is so congested, with the temple buildings completely out of bounds. The wind velocity was heavy and, to hit the pillboxes we had to virtually fire vertically upwards, knowing fully well that even if there was the slightest miss, or a shell got deflected by wind, it could fall on the temple, or on our own men."

Yet the artillery fire was accurately directed with deadly effect in the early hours of June 4. Eyewitnesses recall how shell after shell hit the pillboxes, blowing them apart bit-by-bit, and bodies flung down by explosions made an eerie sight. The best evidence of the accuracy of the shelling is the massive water tower behind the serais which still stands though with large, gaping holes.

Operation Bluestar

For the first time in 400 years the recital of gurbani was about to stop in the Golden Temple. As dusk fell on June 5, commandos dressed in jet-black dungarees slipped into the temple complex through the road between the serias and the Guru Ramdass langar building. They were able to bring back safely Akali Dal leaders like Harchand Singh Longowal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra along with their key aides living in the Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Guru Ramdass Serai and Guru Nanak Niwas. The darkened sky was lit with bright red tracers and massive columns of smoke billowed from the langar building where heavy fighting took place. Foot-soldiers marching towards the Akal Takht ran into heavy machine-gun barrage from the Harmandir Sahib. Artillery pounded the Akal Takht and the heavily fortified pillboxes on top of the two 18th century towers and the langar building. During the day officers guided the fire from Chetak helicopters. On the evening of June 6 jawans charged the Akal Takht under the cover of armour and subdued the opposition after fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Bhindranwale and his key associates, Amrik Singh and Shahbeg Singh were found dead in the basement of the building. A squadron of tanks and armoured personnel carriers guarded the approaches to the temple, aiming their machine-guns at the parapets. The last to fall was the Harmandir Sahib. On the evening of June 6, 22 terrorists led by the All India Sikh Students Federation General Secretary Harminder Singh Sandhu came out with a white flag. The first phase of Operation Bluestar was over.

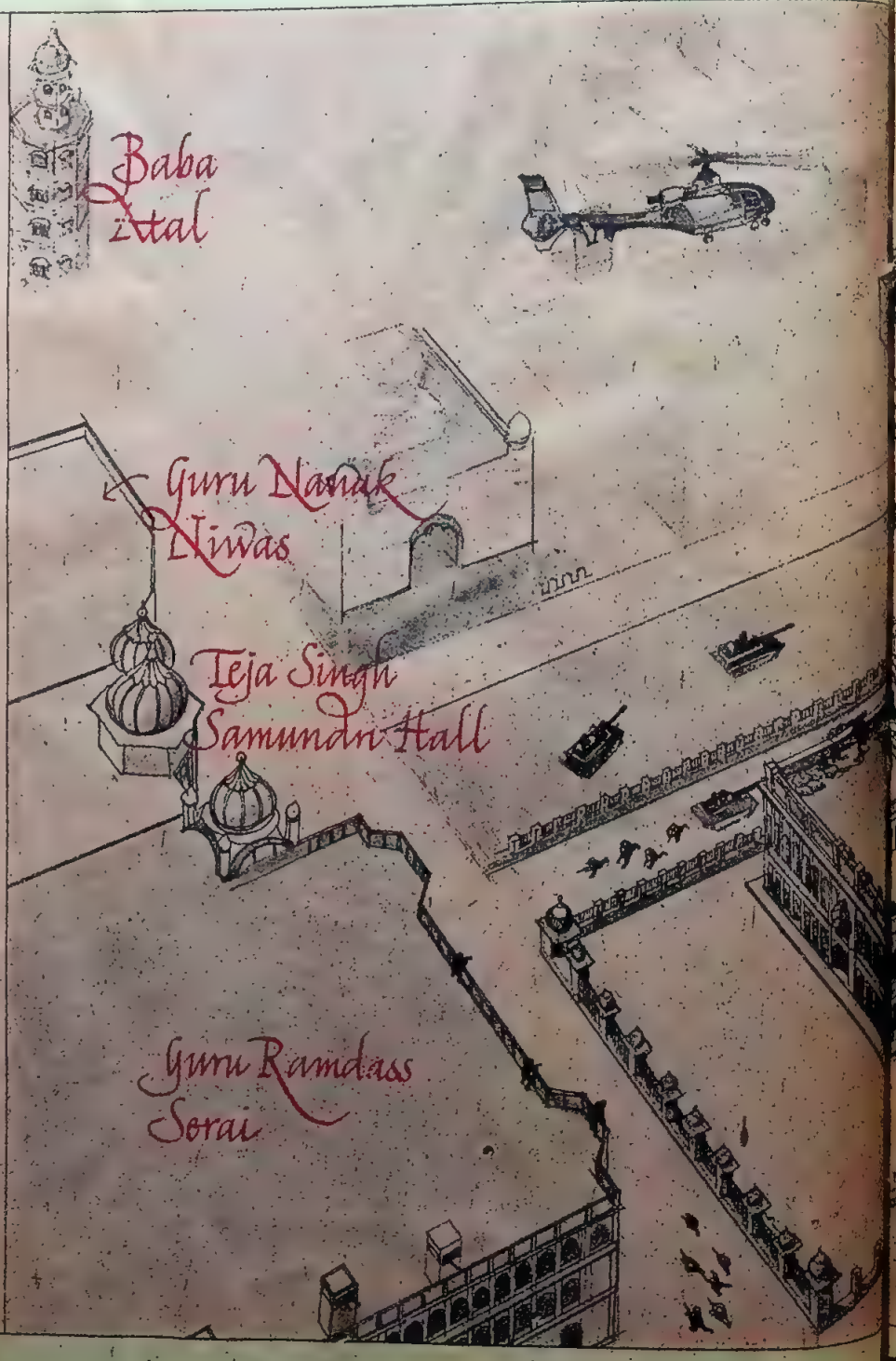
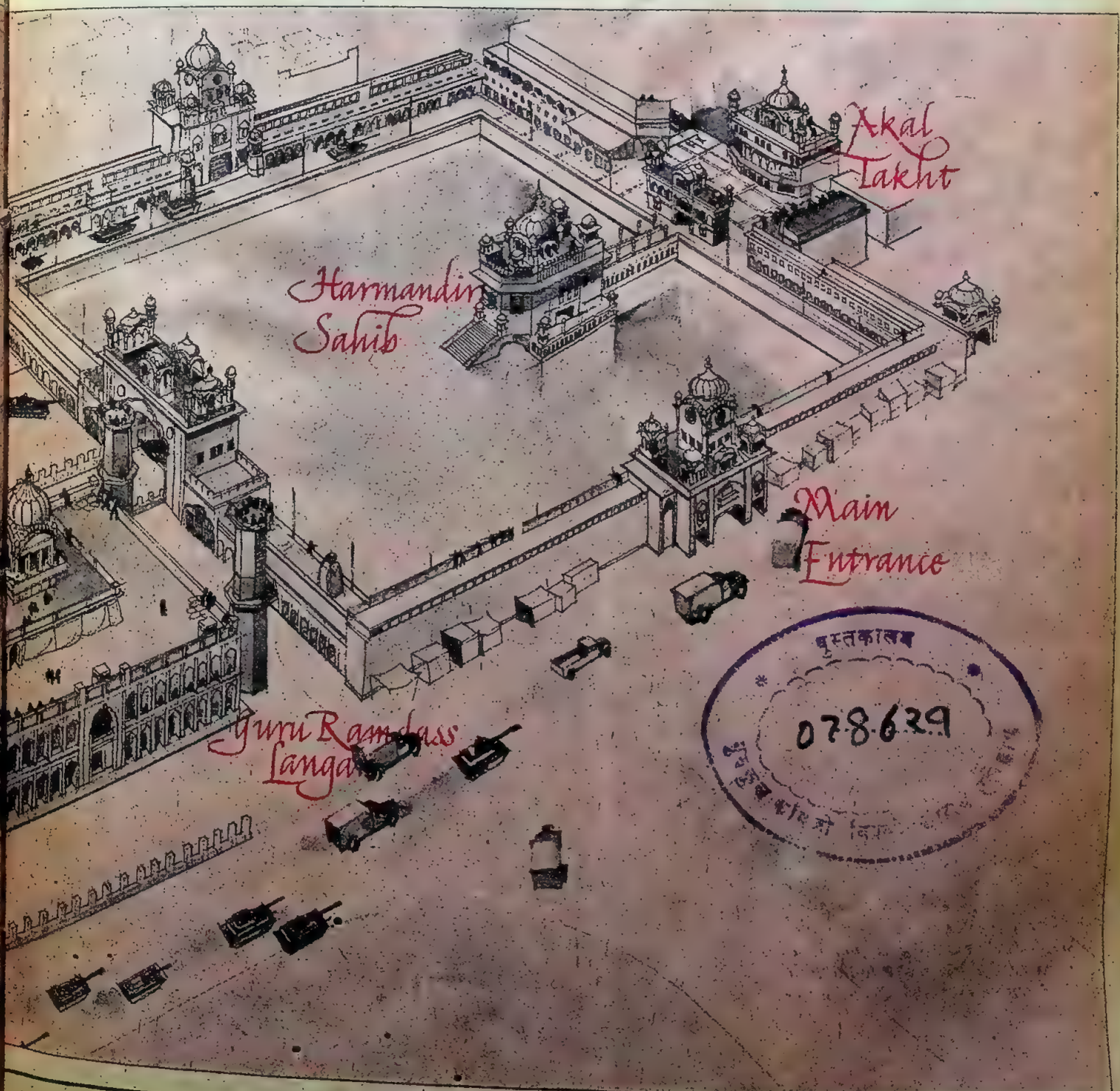


Illustration by ITU CHAUDHURI

THE MEN of the Babbar Khalsa group, opposed to Bhindranwale but equally zealous in the fight for the temple, had occupied the tank only to be blown to bits. Later the tank was punctured with shells to send the water gushing downwards, causing confusion among the Babbars manning the gun emplacements beneath it.

The jawans had no real reason to be satisfied with the morning's work, which later turned out to be no more than minor surgery, hardly touching the core of the malaise. This became obvious in the afternoon as the extremists opened fire with rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG's) and rockets, one of which hit a picket, killing a Bihar Regiment jawan and wounding three. Already quick to adjust their tactics with the discovery of new resolve and firepower in the temple, the generals again changed tactics. This time, they realised that the use of "K" vehicles —as tanks and armoured personnel carriers are called in army parlance—had now become inevitable if the temple was to be taken.

June 5: Army gunners again got down to the job of softening up the temple defences, with the cannons placed in the historic Jallianwala Bagh close to the serais firing with deadly effect and accuracy. The casualties inside the temple mounted steeply even as the army called in police officers familiar with the area to broadcast appeals for surrender. The artillery kept up an incessant barrage throughout, with officers in two Chetak helicopters hovering over the temple complex, directing the aim of fire. But, again hopes that the demonstration of firepower would soften the defenders' will



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were shortlived: the only people to surrender, later that evening, were nearly 200 SGPC employees, their women and children, and some of the labourers employed inside the gurudwara.

THE SIEGE had by now been laid for 60 hours — many more than the planners had anticipated it would take to neutralise the opposition. The generals knew they were running out of time. "Ideally, in such a situation," said an officer, "it would have been useful to continue the siege for a few days more to smoke out at least a part of the opposition. But here we could not afford that luxury." The key constraint was the growing mob violence around Amritsar and in the whole area of Punjab west of the Beas. As word of the siege spread, thousands of people began gathering in hamlets all round Amritsar, trying to converge on the town to "defend the temple". As helicopter-borne reconnaissance patrols scoured the countryside looking for even the smallest accumulation of people, hundreds of wireless sets in the region repeated the alarming message from the police chiefs asking all officers to "shoot at sight anyone seen on the streets and at once fire at the mobs".

But this was unavoidable in view of the mass upsurge that was taking place in the countryside, threatening a communal holocaust. At Golwad village in the Jhubal police station area, barely 25 km from Amritsar, over 30,000 people armed with an assortment of firearms and traditional weapons had gathered under the leadership of Baba Bidhi Chand, a well-known mahant, to march towards Amritsar, vowing to save the temple and kill Hindus. Crowds were also gathering in the same region around Ajnala and even Raja Sansi, close to the Amritsar airport. Tanks had to be sent in to contain these. And to the east, large numbers of people were also gathering round the villages of Dhandkesali, Fatehpur Rajputan and around Batala in the Gurdaspur district.

Though a large crowd assembled at Chowk Mehta, Bhindranwale's original headquarters immediately ran into an army patrol, at the village of Verka, famous for its milk products, the Punjab Armed Police failed to contain a crowd that nearly lynched two constables and took their rifles away. Mercifully, a helicopter patrol spotted the people on the march and immediately vectored on an army patrol which prevented possible communal violence.

But the officers leading the operation were not reassured by this. One later explained: "In such a situation the determination of the mobs increases on a cumulative basis. We had no doubt that with the passage of time the mobs would get bigger and angrier, and unless something drastic was done we would have dozens of Jallianwala Baghs around Amritsar alone. It is all very nice to talk in terms of effective, deterrent fire, but there is a limit to how many people you can kill out of a mob." It was this that prompted the generals to choose what one of them later called the devil's alternative — the storming of the temple complex.

June 5, night: By dusk things had come to a head. As men of the 10 Guards under Lt-Colonel Mohammed Israr, regarded as some of the finest troops in the world and trained specifically for the assault role, prepared for the H-hour, hasty consultations got underway in the serais where moderate Akali leaders like

RAGHU RAI



Extremist fortifications being reinforced on top of the temple towers

Longowal, Tohra and the Dal's official spokesman Balwant Singh Ramoowalia were hiding.

While the guardsmen geared up and the moderates hedged, another group of men was going about preparing for its job with the cool, calculating efficiency of a commando unit. Strapping on bullet-proof jackets, the men made last-minute checks on their very specialised weapons and gear. They were an impressive lot—a hundred lean, wiry men, many of them officers, all in jet-black dungarees. For the first time in the history of the Indian Army, one of its youngest units, the Commandos, was preparing to go into action. As darkness engulfed the complex, 40 commandos, carrying sleek American 5.56 mm rifles mounted with menacingly large bayonets, as well as Bren-guns with telescopic sights slipped into the serais on a mission that could mean death for each of them.

Their brief was clear—to bring out the moderates safely. While other units gave covering fire, they cut off the serais from the temple area, braving fire from all sides, to ensure the safe escape of the moderates. In the process, they suffered heavy casualties: of the 40 who went in, three were killed and 19 wounded despite their bullet-proof jackets. "This was a fiery baptism, we didn't do badly," recalled one commando later.

They had managed, around midnight to extricate Longowal, Tohra, Ramoowalia, Akhand Kirtani Jatha chief Bibi Amarjit Kaur and others including senior SGPC officials. But extremist marksmen got two of their prize quarries—former Akali Dal secretary Gurcharan Singh whom Bhindranwale had accused of plotting to kill his close associate Surinder Singh Sodhi, as well as the colourful SGPC member Bagga Singh, who had made no bones about his contempt for Bhindranwale.



WHILE the authorities whisked away the Akali leaders to the Raja Sansi contonment, the Commandos' job was far from over. They were now supposed to lead other assault groups into the temple complex. So they slipped in again, in larger numbers this time. Splitting up into small bands, they made suicidal raids on LMG emplacements, trying to clear the passage for the main body of troops and cut off extremists positioned in various parts of the temple complex from each other, suffering heavy casualties but maintaining their tenuous hold nevertheless. It was then the turn of the infantrymen.

The first assault was concentrated on the road separating the serais from the temple complex (*see sketch*) and cut off the defenders vertically. There was bloody, expensive close quarter battle before the serais as defenders' machine-guns fired from all directions and the jawans had to fight pitched battles, often hand-to-hand, to clear each emplacement. For all practical purposes, this meant each of the scores of balconies and rooms facing the road. As the battle for the serais intensified, battle cries were heard elsewhere too.

Infantrymen charged in from the other, narrower roads, making for the langar building, the Akal Takht and numerous extremist positions all over the marbled, colonnaded *parikrama* round the temple, which the faithful must walk barefooted to reach the Akal Takht and the sanctum sanctorum.

In normal times the *parikrama* is awash with devout volunteers carrying buckets to cool and clean the exquisite marble structure. But this evening, the

marble was destined to be turned into a gory mosaic of red and olive green as jawans, caught on a flat surface with no cover fell to the massive barrage of machine- gun fire. Under orders not to fire even a single shot at the Golden Temple, they were caught in the middle with MMG's firing from the "out of bounds" temple and the Akal Takht building. Strategically placed in a straight line with the temple, this became more or less unapproachable. In repeated charges, the infantrymen tried to reach the building from the flanks but the barrage of fire was impossible to penetrate. "Every inch of the place was absolutely covered with machine-gun fire," recalls an infantry officer. "So heavy was the concentration of fire that, even in a regular war between two countries' armies, officers would never have allowed troops to peep out of the trenches. A frontal assault would have been a military absurdity," he added.

But these were unusual times and as casualties mounted, new units were pushed in. These were the Guards, Madrasis, Garhwalis, Dogras and the Punjabis. Over a hundred were hit even in the initial stages of the assault. Says an officer: "It was so utterly frustrating for the jawans who saw their comrades die under fire from the temple and yet could not shoot back. Frankly even we never thought our men could have shown so much patience." At another, higher level, however, people were running out of patience and time. The commanders now decided on harsher methods, the use of armour.

Breaking their way in from the side of the serais, tanks and wheeled armoured personnel carriers rumbled on to the *parikrama*, their machine-guns blazing and jawans following. The cover of armour brought down the casualty rate steeply, but there still was no breakthrough. Meanwhile the troops had, on the other side, virtually neutralised the serais, and much of the resistance from the Guru Ramdass langar building ended as it caught fire under heavy shelling. Carrying shoulder-fired Carl Gustav guns and grenade-launchers, jawans went from terrace to terrace, clearing out resistance. Dawn saw the sun rise on a stalemate, the terrorists holed up in the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib, and the army everywhere else.

June 6: When the curfew was relaxed for two hours in the afternoon, this stalemate still prevailed and the extremists remained in firm control of the temple and Akal Takht even as the army picked up its own and the extremists' dead and wounded from the other areas. Any approach towards the Akal Takht was still suicidal. Meanwhile, the extremists had unsheathed yet another surprise weapon in their armoury—a shoulder-fired anti-tank missile launcher that damaged one of the armoured personnel carriers. The troops relaxed and waited for night and the *coup de grace*.

Towards the evening, however, a decision had been taken to overcome the Akal Takht defences by using artillery fire and, for the first time, even the tanks' main cannons were used, though sparingly, to bring down the outer facade, pillars and canopy of the building. Amritsar was to remain awake for yet another night with the incessant roar of cannon-fire.

Extremist arms, including grenades, Sten-guns, LMG's and ammunition recovered from the complex

PIB



Accounts of what happened on the night of June 6 are still imprecise about the exact sequence of events, and it is impossible to say for sure when the resistance capitulated. But, apparently sometime in the course of the night Bhindranwale, along with key lieutenants Shahbeg Singh, a sacked major-general of the Indian Army, and Amrik Singh, president of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) decided to fight the last battle from the Akal Takht basement (Ghura Sahib), after most of his die-hard defenders had fallen. When the jawans overpowered a machine-gun nest by throwing grenades on the ground floor, one of the shell splinters hit Bhindranwale in the face. And as he desperately tried to take cover elsewhere, he was caught in bursts of Sten-gun fire.

There was an element of irony in the way the end came for Bhindranwale who, to twist a metaphor, had always lived by the Sten-gun, his weapon of preference. With his death ended a legend—of a most wantonly cruel scourge for some, of a soldier-saint for some others. But keeping him company even in death were Shahbeg Singh and Amrik Singh, the key personae in the three-year drama of blood and gore. Only a few years younger than Bhindranwale, Amrik Singh had fought to the end, setting at rest the rumours of his clash with his mentor. Bhindranwale had, in a complicated process of succession, taken over the mantle of the chief of the *Damdami Taksal*, a renowned Sikh seminary from Amrik's father, Sant Kartar Singh Bhindranwale.

But while Amrik Singh's dedication could be attributed to old loyalty and religious fervour, what led Shahbeg Singh to gang up with Bhindranwale? A celebrated guerrilla warfare expert of the army Shahbeg had, as a brigadier, trained the Mukti Bahini during the 1971 Bangladesh

ARMY COMMANDERS

"We had no other choice"

DESPITE the unexpectedly strong resistance from the extremists in the Golden Temple, the military commanders in charge of Operation Bluestar made every effort to keep the media informed of the progress of their efforts to secure the temple complex in their daily press briefings. Though security restrictions obviously limited the extent of the information they parted with, the three commanders, Lt-General K. Sundarji, Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dayal and Major-General R.K. Gaur were surprisingly candid when Chandigarh Correspondent GOBIND THUKRAL *interviewed them jointly in the immediate wake of the operation. Excerpts:*



R.D. SHARMA

(From left) Generals Dayal, Gaur and Sundarji: "we suffered"

Q. Would you justify the involvement of the armed forces in civil strife? Shouldn't it have been left to the politicians and the police to tackle the situation?

A. There's nothing wrong in the army coming to the aid of the civil authority. Sometimes the situation demands it . . . the political executive feels the need of army help. I think it should be forthcoming without any reservation. Moreover, when a country's security is threatened by a civil disturbance, the armed forces are duty-bound to answer any call.

Q. What exactly was the task assigned to the military in Punjab?

A. We were called for a specific mission—to root out terrorism. Religious places were being misused. These were command posts for terrorists. Harmandir Sahib, the sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs, was the bastion of terrorists. A God-fearing and honest community that has often brought glory to the country was getting a bad name. Our job was to clear the place of terrorists and wipe them out of their other hide-outs, too.

Q. Have you accomplished this task?

A. The first phase is over. We have cleared all the religious places of these anti-national elements. We raided 38 gurudwaras, five Hindu temples and one mosque. Over 250 terrorists, including their source of inspiration Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale were killed, another 50 wounded and over 450 captured. We seized a large quantity of weapons including medium and light machine-guns, rocket launchers, rifles Sten-guns and a large quantity of ammunition and hand grenades. I must say they were well prepared and trained.

Q. How difficult was this task?

A. It was a very sensitive task. Rightly, religious sentiments of the Sikhs were involved. Believe me, we went into the Golden Temple complex with humility in our hearts and prayers on our lips. . . . We took this decision not in anger, but in sadness. We suffered many more dead and wounded than is normal in such engagements. We lost one officer and 47 jawans, a dozen are missing and over 100 were wounded.

Q. How was the operation conducted?

A. We were very careful on two counts. First, to cause less bloodshed since these were our own misguided countrymen, and second, to cause least damage to the complex. At first we used light calibre weapons, and even those after giving enough warning. We were called in on June 3 and were around the complex. We did not enter till June 5 evening. Once inside, we again allowed them more time. Some 500 people came out—these included terrorists as well as pilgrims. They were taken to safe places. Even SGPC chief G.S. Tohra and Akali Dal President H.S. Longowal were taken to proper places. Time was allowed to other gurudwaras, too. Only when we were sure that our appeals were not heeded, we opened fire. Since the other side resorted to heavy LMG and MMG fire, including rockets, we had to make a befitting reply. Tanks too were pressed into service. Our job was not only to see how our men reacted to the entry into the holy places of worship, but to be careful of public reaction, too.

Q. What kind of force was used?

A. We had, out of the six commanders who entered the complex, four Sikhs, one Hindu and one Muslim. No one resented it and each did an honourable job. It was the other side that was desecrating the holy temple and killing innocent people. Tell me, which religion preaches this?

Q. How did the other side conduct itself?

A. They were well equipped. The Akal Takht was very well fortified with sand bags. All the three floors were turned into command posts. The whole night long there was fierce fighting. We had to use rockets and MMG's to wipe out the terrorists there. In fact, we spared the Harmandir Sahib at great cost to ourselves. Over four score terrorists kept firing from there for more than 24 hours. We suffered, but saved the building.

Q. The state-wide curfew, censorship, and blockage of transport and communication hasn't happened before even in times of war. Wasn't this like semi-martial law?

A. We had the information that thousands of Sikhs were likely to reach Amritsar once the news of the army crackdown spread. We stopped all movement on roads, imposed curfew in all towns, and since the newspapers would have helped spread all kinds of stories, the operation would have been very difficult. Communal feelings were also likely to be roused through the media. That's why we recommended a total ban on newspapers. We are against any control over the freedom of the press, but times like this require a little more caution. We will lift the ban the moment the operations are over.

Q. Because of this there was a lot of misinformation and rumours around. Wasn't that harmful, too?

A. We had no other choice.

campaign. Lt-General Jagjit Singh Aurora, who was his immediate boss as army commander, remembers him as someone "rather good at his job". Says he: "He used to trim his hair though he wore a turban. With the Mukti Bahini, he wore lungis and balaclava caps. I must say he played the part."

Originally a Gurkha Regiment officer, Shahbeg had served with the Parachute Brigade and later the Punjab Regiment too and, as major-general, commanded the Madhya Pradesh area from Jabalpur. It was here that he was charged with corruption and told to leave after a CBI inquiry. Two months ago he had told INDIA TODAY: "I am an old sick man with no interest in fighting. But I would be a liar if I said I am not frustrated and angry. In the army I was done in. But I am not as much of a guerrilla leader here as people believe."

Army sources, however, say that he was indeed responsible for the tremendously effective, fortress-like defence of the temple. The army later had more surprises. Shahbeg's young daughter as well as Amrik Singh's wife were caught manning LMG nests.

But the last citadel to fall was the temple from where terrorists, led by the AISSF General Secretary Harminder Singh Sandhu continued to fire. Barred from firing at the temple, the jawans tried once to physically overpower the terrorists by rushing across the bridge barefoot. Many were felled by a hail of bullets and the attempt was given up. When even the frogmen failed to break in, the army decided to sit it out for as long as necessary.

EVEN with the leaders accounted for, and the main battle over, resistance continued and, initially, the army suffered heavily as die-hards hiding in the maze of basements and tunnels under the temple complex kept on emerging from manholes to lob grenades or take pot-shots at armymen. It was in one of these sniper raids that the 10th battalion of the Dogra Regiment lost three officers. The extremists, living on generous supplies of roasted gram and *shakarpara* stored at various strategic points underground, even managed to abduct an Army Medical Corps doctor, a captain, his compounder and two jawans.

The army later traced the basement where the men had been dragged and slaughtered, and cleared it after heavy shelling. It was now yet again the turn of the commandos to wage a long hide-and-seek battle with the terrorists in tunnels and basements. Sniping continued for almost a week and the terrorists showed up most devastatingly as President Zail Singh visited the temple. Snipers opened fire and hit the commandant of the Commando battalion standing just a few yards away from him. Zail Singh (*see box*) smiled wryly as the commandos' colonel saw a bullet slip off his bullet-proof jacket and go clean through his upper arm, and kept walking coolly till the end of the *parikrama*.

While the Golden Temple complex was taken, the army had also gone into action, raiding over 40 places of worship — including five temples and a mosque — all over the state. Except at Tarn Taran gurudwara where five army men and the same number of extremists were killed and the Dukh Niwaran gurudwara in Patiala and a gurudwara at Moga, this hunt yielded very little. The army was now in the process of moving over to the countryside for a counter-insurgency operation of a more classic nature.

However, considering the enormous scope of Operation Bluestar and the sensitive nature of its target, it is obvious that many aspects of the operation will remain in the grey area between fact and supposition. Government sources have claimed

Suspected extremists being rounded up

SHEKHAR GUPTA



that between 300 and 400 terrorists and 90-odd armymen were killed inside the temple complex. According to army sources involved in the operation, the casualty figure is much higher on both sides. By the evening of June 9, over 750 inquest reports had been prepared on the extremist dead alone, and many bodies still awaited clearance. It would be safe to assume that close to 1,000 extremists were killed, while army sources admit that their own dead could be as high as 200 or more.

The army and the security agencies are now analysing their own failings in the aftermath of the operations. The President, for example, raised a very significant question by asking Governor B.D. Pande and Inspector General of Police P.S. Bhindar what the police and intelligence agencies were doing while thousands of weapons were smuggled into the temple. "It seems you had given your eyes and ears on loan to somebody," he said angrily. The intelligence agencies had also failed to establish the terrorists' foreign link by the capture of Chinese, American and Pakistani weapons, Pakistani passports and men.

And, if it was the time for the intelligence agencies to do some soul-searching, the generals were still reflecting on the experiences of the onerous task assigned to them. Said Lt-General Krishnaswamy Sundarji, GOC-in-C, Western Command: "We went inside with humility in our hearts and prayers on our lips." Added his deputy, Dayal: "We in the army hold all places of religion in equal reverence." The army had played its part living up to its secular traditions. The three key generals planning the operations were Sikhs, so were four of the six battalion commanders participating in the action, and the troops too had a fair sprinkling of Sikhs. Yet the army brass was now worried by the wave of desertions in some of the Sikh units. The generals say it is very insignificant, a passing phase. Said one: "Some of this had been anticipated. But the cost-benefit ratio still worked out favourably. Let's face it, what we fought in Amritsar was not a battle against a stray bunch of hoodlums. It was war against Khalistan."

IN A LONG-term perspective, however, the war had barely begun. The success of Operation Bluestar depends largely on the all-crucial second phase of the blueprint. With Bhindranwale and his key lieutenants exterminated, it is clear that the back of the extremist movement has been broken. Without a charismatic leader to inspire them, the remaining extremists hiding in the countryside within and outside Punjab have little scope for major mischief. The second phase calls for the army to remain in Punjab till all evidence of extremist presence is eliminated, while a parallel political campaign is launched to restore the state to normalcy and search quickly for a political solution.

But the danger now lies outside the country as well. The more sophisticated weaponry found inside the temple clearly indicates that outside elements were involved. Most of the heavier weapons bore Pakistan or Chinese markings. The Government has made it quite clear that it suspects Pakistan, but that attitude has now become a case of crying wolf so it is likely to hold little water. The presence of at least two circumcised Nihangs among those killed at the temple would lend some credence to the allegation. Already, in London's Bayswater Road, self-styled Khalistan leader Jagjit Singh Chauhan has set up Khalistan House, the seat of his so-called government in exile. The threat from him and his followers has been dismissed lightly by the Indian Government but there is a real danger of the fringe elements in his following taking to

Injured jawans in a hospital in Ambala

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



terrorist activity against the more vulnerable Indian-related targets outside India. If they adopt the kind of tactics and fanaticism that European terrorist groups did, the Government will find itself in a tight spot.

As the reactions among the Sikhs showed, a lot of political and emotional groundwork still remains to be done to convince them that the army had not inflicted a crushing defeat on their community but only cleared their own holy shrine of people who were as much a threat to them as to the rest of the country. Nothing characterised this distrust better than the sudden discord in some of the Sikh units of the army as wild rumours spread.

It began at Sriganganagar, a border town in Rajasthan where over 400 jawans of 9 Sikh Light Infantry rebelled, only to be subdued later after a series of skirmishes. This was followed by the most serious of the mutinies at Ramgarh near Ranchi in Bihar where, charged by the rumours that their women were being raped by the army in Punjab, 1,438 recruits revolted, killing Brigadier R.C. Puri, the regimental centre commandant, wounded three other officers and escaped with weapons, to surrender after bloody gunbattles with armymen in five different places in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Similar desertions took place in Pune, Thane, Jammu, Siliguri, Silchar and Alwar. Army spokesmen, however, called these "insignificant".

Tragically, the desertions were a direct result of the wild rumours that were flying around after the siege took place. With the press gagged, the only source of information was All India Radio and Doordarshan, both badly lacking in credibility. But whatever the Government's wisdom in clamping a media black-out resulting in the dangerous rumour-mongering, it made full use of television to try and convince the Sikhs at least that the Harmandir Sahib, the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple, was undamaged and the holy relics including the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, intact.

But simple jawans fired by rumours in far away cantonments can hardly be blamed for rebelling when adverse reactions came from even people who constitute the *cognoscenti* among the Sikhs. The most surprising example was of Khushwant Singh, a bitter critic of Bhindranwale, his style of politics and his Khalistan demand. Speaking to INDIA TODAY after returning his Padma Bhushan he said: "My main objection is that the Government allowed the situation to build up, allowed them to take arms in and out when every gate had an armed post. What were they doing? They can't get away saying there was no alternative; why was it allowed to reach this point?"

SIMILAR objections came in from Lt-General Aurora who too has been leading a campaign in favour of the Akali moderates to isolate Bhindranwale. Says he: "Even if Bhindranwale was a rebel and a rabble-rouser, the effort should have been to isolate him and strengthen the moderates who are patriotic people. But just the reverse has been done. The consequence is that now every

THE PRESIDENT

Dignified Demeanour

THE PRESIDENT of India is not usually involved in the day-to-day affairs of the country. But last fortnight Giani Zail Singh, the country's first Sikh head of state, found himself right in the heart of the Punjab crisis. Departing from convention, the President flew into trouble-torn Amritsar in a chartered Indian Airlines Boeing, and even in Delhi kept in touch with the latest developments on the crack-down on terrorists. Zail Singh was in something of a predicament: as a devout Sikh, he was understandably concerned about the wild rumours about army action in the Golden Temple but as the President he was equally concerned with a solution which would restore communal harmony in Punjab.

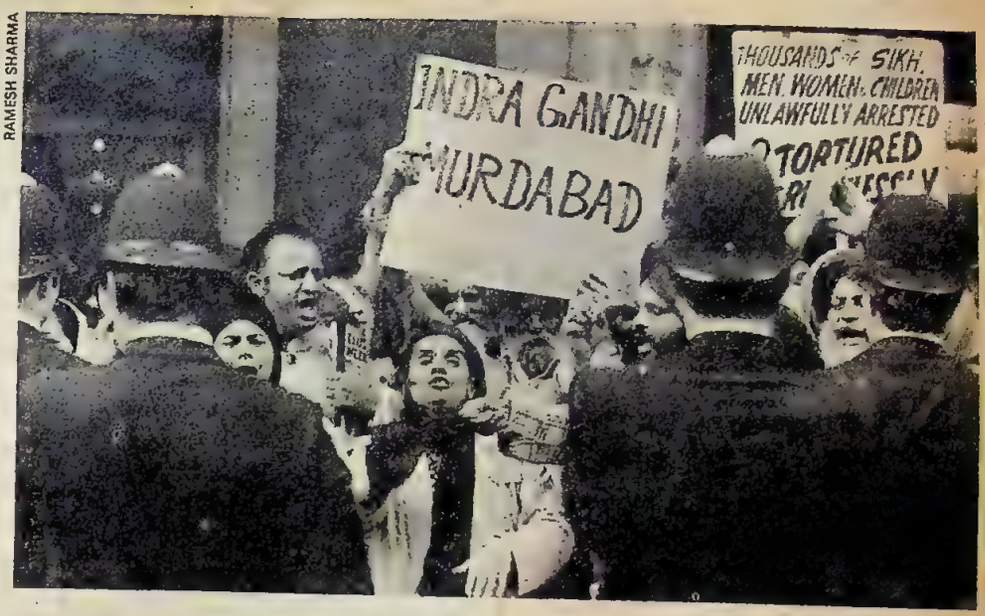
In the temple complex, bullet holes pock-marked the walls of the Akal Takht, the seat of temporal power of the Sikh religion, when the President's entourage solemnly marched its way down the hall. Visibly shaken by the spectacle of devastation and the smell of death all around, the President, barefoot and looking forlorn, offered his prayers to the Granth Sahib (the holy Sikh scripture) draped in white linen and kept on a pedestal at the Harmandir Sahib.

The presidential visit acquired an eerie poignancy with the presence of fire-tenders close by the temple complex, the maintenance squad washing off fresh bloodstains from the floor and the walls, and the conservancy staff clearing away the rubble of a three-day siege. The high-profile visit, in which Zail Singh was accompanied by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister R.K. Dhawan and Rajiv Gandhi's influential confidant Arun Singh, operated at two levels. At one, it was an anguished journey of an individual to the scene of a gruesome yet avoidable tragedy involving his faith. At the other, it was an eminently successful anodyne to assua-



Zail Singh making traditional cash offering during his visit to the temple

Sikh protesters outside the Indian High Commission in London



RAMESH SHARMA

Sikh feels that he is a suspect in the eyes of the country unless proved otherwise. I totally deprecate the action. I think it is a terrible thing to happen. In what way has it improved the situation?"

This view found support even among some non-Sikhs. Said former Union cabinet secretary Nirmal Kumar Mukerjee: "I think the Sikhs, to a man, will feel that the community has been given a tight slap across the face. What we have, as a result, is an alienated solid Sikh sub-nationality. I am afraid this may give fillip to the Khalistan demand. Bhindranwale dead may be a lot more trouble than Bhindranwale alive."

From the Government's point of view the raid had become the last resort after repeated rounds of talks with the Akalis failed to come up with a solution. Said Union Home Secretary M.M.K. Wali: "Of late, the killings were becoming completely wanton and senseless. Moreover, we had evidence that the extremists were threatening and influencing the Government functionaries, including the judiciary. Moreover, there was every possibility of the Akali morcha beginning on June 3 turning violent." Government spokesmen also argue that those Sikh intellectuals and moderate leaders who now accuse the army of having desecrated the temple could themselves have done something substantial earlier to prevent it becoming a terrorist hide-out. Said a senior bureaucrat: "The moderate leaders and

ge the hurt feelings of the world's 15 million Sikhs. Said Sardar Gurbux Singh, vice-chancellor of Delhi University: "The President's visit to the Golden Temple provided a healing touch. The Sikh community needed it badly."

The indignant pressure on him was compounded by the covert propaganda of his detractors, both within the Congress(I) and the Sikh community, that he was indeed guilty of connivance. Their argument was that as the Supreme Commander of the armed forces, Zail Singh had to bear the sole responsibility for the army's action inside and around the temple.

Oblivious of the President's status as a mere titular head, there were many in the community who would have bought this argument. But Zail Singh conducted himself with exemplary discretion, at once owning the responsibility for and distancing himself from the gory incident. On June 7, the day the security forces took control of the Golden Temple, he made himself unavailable for the national film award function at the capital's Vigyan Bhavan. Later, he cancelled all his public engagements outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

In his official residence, meanwhile, the President received a flurry of visitors. On May 30, barely three days before the army action had begun, Mrs Gandhi spent two tense hours with him, discussing, according to a Rashtrapati Bhavan source, "the entire gamut of options". Rajiv followed suit, meeting him twice before the action. Perhaps the most significant meeting that Zail Singh had in that spell was with K.P. Singh Deo, the minister of state for defence, on June 4, the day after the siege had begun. Before his visit to Amritsar, he had also had a secret 90-minute audience with Arun Singh, who had earlier flown in an Indian Air Force aircraft with Singh Deo to fetch photographs of the curfew-locked city for the President's eyes only. Both Rajiv and Mrs Gandhi repeated their visits to him after the action.

What transpired in his talks with the Prime Minister after the incident will perhaps never be known to the public. But Zail Singh evidently expressed his concern for the delay in completing the operation. Before a group of army officers, he scolded the Punjab Governor, B.D. Pandey, and other state officials for going wrong in their estimates of arms and ammunition inside the temple. "To whom did you mortage your eyes and ears all these days?" he is said to have asked.

There are portents that his delicate balancing act will come to an end. He was never quite averse to strong action against the terrorists, but always desired the opening of fire to be preceded by gestures of political settlement—the moves of magnanimity that could have taken the rancour from the military strike. But that was not to be.

Seemingly aware of his crucial role, Zail Singh refused to buckle under the pressure of a microscopic minority who wanted his resignation. Instead he advised his followers both inside and outside the country to condemn the misuse of religious places and appealed to them to work for communal harmony. It was on his advice that Doordarshan approached Akal Takht chief priest Kirpal Singh for an interview. According to Rashtrapati Bhavan sources, he was instrumental in getting the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to send the latest photographs of the Golden Temple all over the world to counter the propaganda of the communalists.

Though Zail Singh upheld the Government's action, he also advised the prime minister to find a lasting political solution. The President has also reportedly reiterated that moderates like Parkash Singh Badal and H.S. Longowal should be politically strengthened so that they could carry the Sikh masses with them. But with one tragic chapter freshly closed, the nation waits in fear and hope for the next to open.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

the SGPC have proved to be absolutely ineffective in safeguarding the sanctity of their own shrines. What the army did was only an effort to throw out those indulging in sacrilege."

Among the people who justify the army actions is Lt-General S.K. Sinha, the former vice-chief of the army staff. Says he: "It is a matter of regret that the army had to enter the Golden Temple, but there were no options left. After all, commandos were forced to enter Mecca to flush out terrorists. Here in India, the head priest of the Vishvanath Temple had to be arrested from inside the temple. It is a tragic example of poor intelligence that they were not aware of the arms build-up inside the temple." But he too feels that the Government followed a policy of "drift and indecision for far too long".

THERE is certainly no faulting the army for having carried out its operation, and the Government for having at last gathered the political will to act decisively on Punjab. But the Government has been blamed with not only not strengthening the moderates, but trying to tar them all with the same brush, resulting in the present situation where there is no prominent Sikh leader it can talk to; no one who they believe can command the respect of the entire community. Whatever hopes remained were dashed last fortnight as former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal and former Union agriculture minister Surjit Singh Barnala were arrested in Chandigarh under the National Security Act.

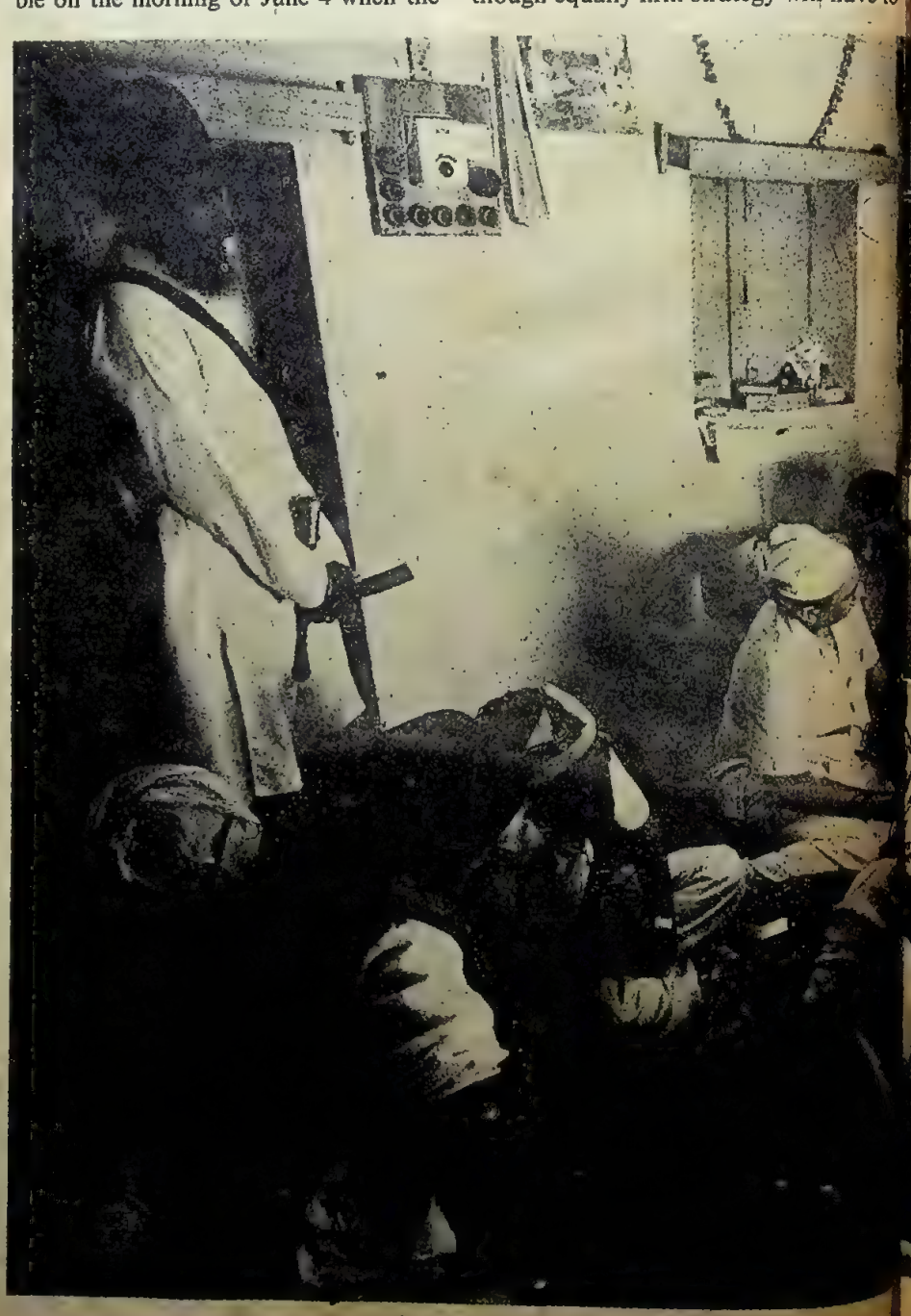
True, Barnala had made some angry statements, but he was badly heckled by hotheads among his own supporters as he tried to stop them raising pro-Khalistan slogans at a gurudwara congregation. Said Badal, in a voice choked with anguish: "The feeling of alienation among the Sikhs has now become powerful. Wittingly or unwittingly, Mrs Gandhi has laid the foundation of Khalistan." Similar reactions came from Sikhs all over the country.

A surprisingly candid reaction, on the other hand, came from the aged Bhai Man Singh, the head *granthi* of the historic Patna Sahib gurudwara. He said: "My main job is to recite the Guru Granth Sahib and I do not know very much about Punjab politics. The army or police should not enter holy shrines as this spoils their sanctity. But if they had to, who was responsible for this? It was the people who created the situation."

But while reactions were varied, and often clearly defined along communal lines, they only underlined the fact that, even if the army action in Punjab was justified, it only marked the beginning of a long haul to restore the state to its old, pre-1980 state of peace, prosperity and tranquillity. And if that is to be achieved, the first step would be to make a strong effort to prevent the Hindus from claiming victory. Mrs Gandhi, at a public meeting on June 11, warned that what happened in Punjab "should not be celebrated as a victory".

That there is still plenty of goodwill between the two communities was visible on the morning of June 4 when the Sultanwind Road market was burnt in Amritsar. In one corner stood Sohan Lal Bhatia, a son of Bhagmal Bhatia, the famous Jallianwala martyr, accusing the Government of having had his shop burnt by creating communal tension. All along, Sikh neighbours—all wearing the orange turban, a sign of protest, helped put out the fire and salvage the remains. "I have no complaint against the Sikhs. Politics will make animals out of any people," said Bhatia.

It is this store of goodwill that the Government now needs to tap. While in the towns the pro-RSS and highly committed Arya Samaj workers will have to be contained, in the villages a different, though equally firm strategy will have to



Bhindranwale's last press conference on the evening of June 2

be followed with the simple, illiterate jathedars who lead the peasants. In fact the army took the first step in this direction by ordering that no jawans accept any water, cold drinks, lassi or food from people in the streets. This would discourage the increasing tendency on the part of the Hindus to look after the jawans posted in their area and to patronise them.

That is just one step to overcome the alienation which strong law and order action inevitably brings in its wake. In the Punjab villages, for example, the people are bitter with the army presence even if the conduct of the jawans has been upright. But the simple Punjabi peasant finds the tank patrols and cordon-and-search operations an unpleasant factor.

THE OPPOSITION, possibly for the first time since the Bangladesh war of 1971, unanimously supported Mrs Gandhi's action in the temple. In her turn the prime minister at a 100-minute meeting with opposition leaders in New Delhi on June 13 told them the Government would bring out a white paper with all the facts about the army action.

The army and the Government will have to tread carefully in the Punjab countryside. As a police officer in Chandigarh remarked: "The point is that the army will have to fight most of its future international wars along the Punjab plains. I am sure the jawans would value having the population on their side." Unfortunately, the current situation has arisen in the kharif sowing season, making life extremely difficult for the farmer who can hardly stir out at night.

On the political level, the Government has already made a beginning by broadcasting the gurbani live on All India Radio from the Golden Temple. Official sources also give strong hints of more unilateral concessions as the situation stabilises in the state. Said an official: "We are treading slowly and cautiously. Our first worry was preventing a communal holocaust; and touch wood, till now nothing has happened."

The tragedy is that this too is a view from one side of the fence, for if you ask an ordinary Sikh, the death of nearly a thousand of his community at the Golden Temple, is holocaust enough, even if it happened in the course of an armed fight. The very magnitude of the killings and destruction has left him nonplussed, isolated and insecure. Even more than maintaining law and order on the ground, it is thus necessary to reassure the Sikhs. And the only way to do it now is by handing over the task of applying the balm to the wounds of beleaguered but progressive and virile community to a benevolent political leader. With President's rule already nine months old, the Constitution demands that the state be returned to popular rule within the next three months. Mrs Gandhi will now have to initiate the search for someone acceptable enough to take over the reins of a state caught even more deeply in the quagmire than Assam was a year ago.

Politically, socially or emotionally, it will not be an easy task. The army's action has touched the nerve of a sensitive community. It has been a watershed, and its crossing is fraught with long-term dangers. The sense of alienation that is now evident is understandable, but it cannot obviously be allowed to harden. And harden it will if all those who were in one way or another responsible for letting Punjab come to this pass do not look into themselves for their own share in the blame but instead try and derive advantage. The Sikhs need to ask why they allowed their temple to be stockpiled with arms. The administration must answer why it so quickly dissolved into ineffectiveness. And the Government why it allowed the whole problem to burn for three long years. If there is no introspection, if there is no understanding, and forgiveness and humanity of the kind preached by all religions, the embers of Operation Bluestar will burn a long, long time and may even ignite again.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Amritsar with bureau reports



CONGRESS(I)

Cross Examination

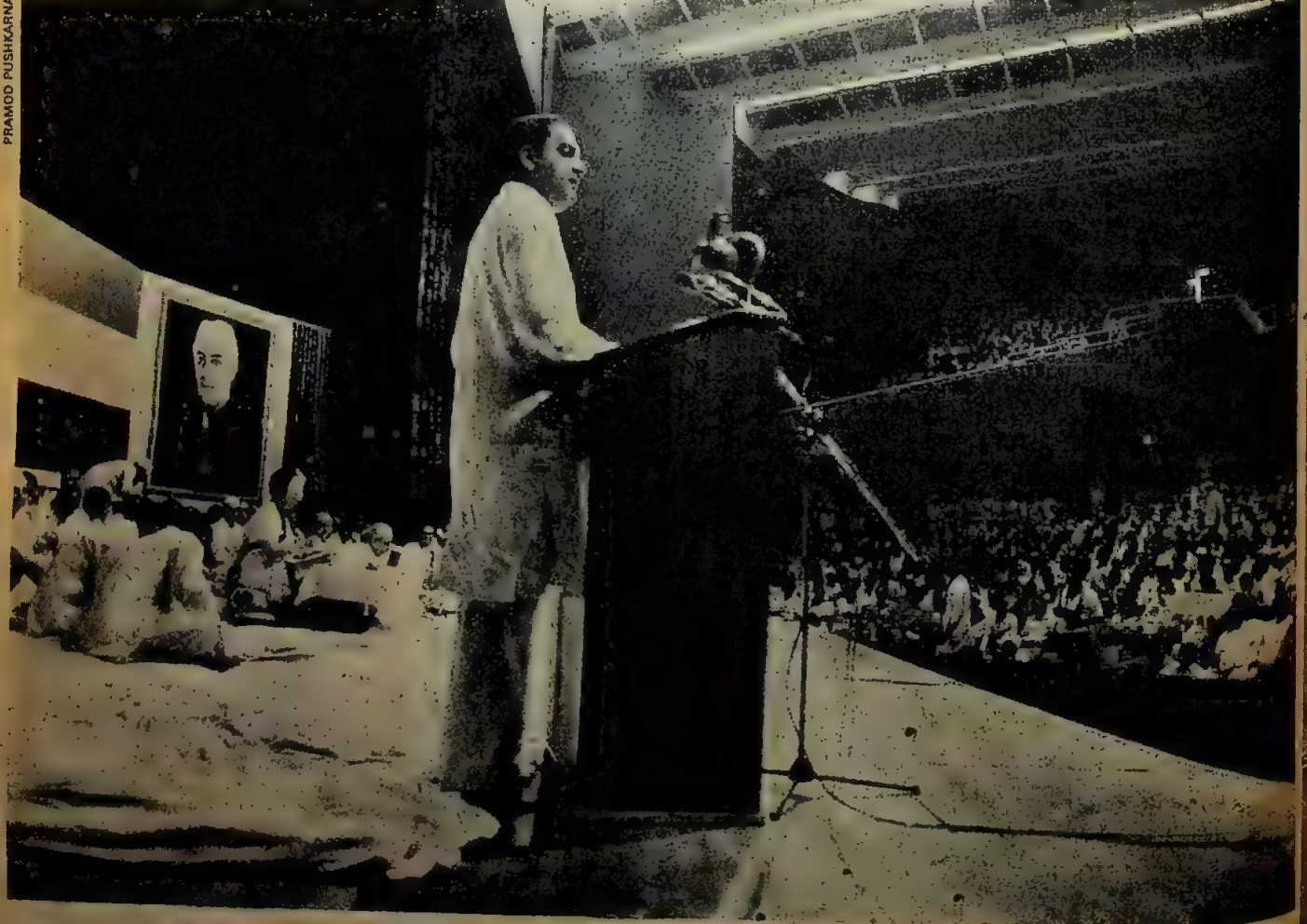
IN UTTAR Pradesh, the minorities are switching allegiance en bloc to the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM) of Maneka Gandhi. In Karnataka, Congressmen are unable to convince the people that the Hegde Government's development programmes are heavily subsidised by the Centre. In West Bengal, though there has been a substantial erosion in the power base of the Marxists, the Congress(I) lacks sufficient will to capitalise on the negative feeling. In Maharashtra, the Government of Vasantrao Patil, by its inept handling of the communal situation, has made it difficult for the Congress(I) workers even to enter some minority pockets. In Assam, many Congress(I) legislators have not visited their constituencies even once since their election last year.

Common knowledge, most of this, but significant yet, as the complaints came not from hardened Congress(I)-baiters but district-level chiefs of the party and its four frontal organisations, 2,500 of whom met in New Delhi for two days early last fortnight to be cross-examined by its commissars. The frontal organisations are: the Youth Congress(I), the women's cell, the Seva Dal, and National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the party's student front. The 'examiners' included a panel of 25 top leaders working under the five newly-appointed zonal heads — Pranab Mukherjee (for southern states), Buta Singh (for West Bengal, Orissa and the north-eastern states), P. Shiv Shankar (for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), P.V. Narasimha Rao (northern states), and Vishwanath Pratap Singh (for Maharashtra and other western states).

The grilling, which continued for eight hours every day at the capital's Asiad Village complex, yielded nearly 10,000 typed pages of answers which, together with the replies obtained in March (*see* INDIA TODAY, March 31) from 3,000 party legislators, will be processed over the next fortnight. "The exercise has nothing to do with the next general elections," said Chandulal Chandrakar, one of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) general secretaries. But the drift of the 35 main questions left few in doubt that the object of the exercise was to:

- ▶ sift 'achievers' from 'non-achievers';
- ▶ understand issues that are likely to influence the elections;
- ▶ identify problem areas for the party; and
- ▶ decide, region-wise, on election strategy.

Just as party MLA's, MLC's and MP's were asked in their March convention to assess the work of the party functionaries, the latter were asked this time round to size up the former. There were candid questions asked about organisational feuds, legislators' 'image', feelings of the minorities and likelihood of betrayal by party colleagues at election time. And, determined not to let grass



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Rajiv addressing AICC(I) meet at Asiad Village complex: more programmes



Zonal heads (from left) Mukherjee, Buta Singh, Shiv Shankar, Narasimha Rao and V.P. Singh: getting answers

grow under the feet of his partymen, AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi announced at the inaugural session a four-month-long programme to "galvanise the organisation". The programme included three national conferences of frontal organisations—the NSUI, the Youth Congress(I) and the women's cell—to be preceded by state-level conferences in July of MP's, MLA's, MLC's, district board chairmen, corporation mayors, corporators and taluka board members. The conferences of frontal organisations will take place at centres as well spread out as Nagpur, Patna and Trivandrum. The exercise culminates with a session of the AICC(I) in October and a plenary session towards the year-end.

THE ORWELLIAN year of 1984 is curiously the busiest year for the Congress(I) ever since it split away from the erstwhile Congress in 1978. Said Motilal Vora, president of the Durg District Congress(I) Committee in Madhya Pradesh, who was a delegate: "Indiraji and Rajivji are continuously giving us programmes. This is a good thing, because Congressmen start fighting among themselves only when they have no work on their hands." Even the paperwork which each delegate had gone through in preparation for the 'interview' was impressive; some of the delegates brought along with them shaded maps of their districts showing zones of influence of the Congress(I) vis-a-vis the opposition parties. The managerial approach was filtering downwards, or so it seemed.

This fortnight, the five zonal chiefs will brief Mrs Gandhi, the Congress(I) president, and Rajiv on the summary of the reports obtained at the March convention as well as at the recently concluded one. "We don't like to share our appraisal of the situation with others", said G.K. Moopanar, yet another AICC(I) general secretary, "but I'm sure that the final report will enable us to see in a nutshell the strengths and weaknesses of the party all across the country." Moopanar confirmed that computer time might have to be hired to process information regarding implementation of the 20-point programme, adding discreetly that the use of modern technology "is not something that can be held against our party".

However, the frenetic pace of activity in the party could not always mask the gnawing anxieties. The by-elections a few weeks earlier, in which the Congress(I) had lost the assembly constituencies of Malihabad and Jakhania in Uttar Pradesh and Taoru in Haryana, all Muslim-dominated, set a sombre backdrop to the June jamboree aimed at collecting computer data. The Maharashtra functionaries attended the convention with grim forebodings about the aftermath of the Bhiwandi and Bombay riots. Before the convention, G.D. Patil, Rajya Sabha member and a supporter of the Union Planning Minister S.B. Chavan, circulated a seven-page memorandum calling for immediate removal of Vasantrao Patil from chief ministership of the state. Chandrashekhar Prabhu, president of the Bombay Youth Congress(I) unit, who claimed to have made a long and impassioned report on the party's organisational state in Bombay city, mentioned later: "It will be hard for us to win the Lok Sabha seats in the city."

Besides, the party has to build from scratch its organisation in Sikkim where Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the ousted chief minister, has carried almost the entire state unit with him. In Andhra Pradesh, Rajashekhar Reddy, the Pradesh Congress(I) president, has tendered his resignation but his replacement has not been found as yet. In Tamil Nadu, the success of the party's electoral adversary—the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (DMK)—in the recent by-election has surprised the Central leaders of the Congress(I) who had all along underestimated the strength of the DMK. "The encouraging signs", listed Moopanar, "are the party's recent victory in two non-Congress(I) states—Karnataka and West Bengal." Obviously, the central leaders are also waiting with bated breath for a breakthrough in another non-Congress(I) state—Jammu & Kashmir. No wonder, therefore, that Mufti Mohammed Syed, the state's Congress(I) president, delivered a 45-minute speech at the convention where he departed from established norm by reporting enthusiastically on fissures in the National Conference.

As usual, there was no dearth of homilies. Kamalapati Tripathi the septuagenarian working president, in his welcome address, described the party convention as an "unprecedented example of internal democracy at work". Shankar Dayal Sharma, a former AICC(I) president, who spoke on the Congress centenary celebrations due next year, described the last six years as "the most memorable chapter in the party's history in recent times". And, even before the convention had begun, H.K.L. Bhagat, the Union minister of state for information and broadcasting, had committed a gaffe by naming Rajiv as Mrs Gandhi's "likely successor" to a foreign television interviewer. Bhagat was officially reprimanded by the high command the next day.

But, beyond the predictable sycophancy and the orchestrated tributes paid to the leadership, the party conventions seem to be achieving at least one purpose: that of spreading an impression that rewards such as electoral nomination will from now on be distributed on an impersonal and objective basis. As Kanhaiyalal Khadiwala, president of the Indore District Congress(I) Committee, said: "I am happy to work in the present set-up where a person is assessed by the yardstick of performance rather than by his skill at manipulative factional politics." The assorted hopefuls are grateful to the leadership for being given the task of filling up more forms than they ever did. Whether or not it brings in dividends at the polls is another matter.

—SUMIT MITRA



NAGENDER RAO

NTR at Hyderabad airport before departure: wooing investors

ANDHRA PRADESH

The Odd Odyssey

N.T. RAMA RAO, Andhra Pradesh's irrepressible chief minister, seems to have found the ideal recipe to stay in the limelight—whether it is donning saffron or diamond earrings. Last fortnight, his two-week mission to the US to "woo the non-resident investors", predictably left behind a trail of controversy and intrigue.

The *piece de résistance* was a collection of silver medallions, embossed with Lord Venkateswara's image which Rama Rao was to give away as free gifts in the US. Irked by this show of generosity, people accused the chief minister of carrying gifts which identified the state Government with a particular religion. According to an order of the executive officer of the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) dated May 10, two officials were allowed to fly to Bombay with Rs 4 lakh to buy silver to make medallions to be distributed by Rama Rao.

However, when the matter became public and criticism of the move increased —especially since the export of silver is prohibited—the state Government officials denied knowledge of such a plan. Meanwhile, Rama Rao quickly countered the controversy by having 5,000 copper medallions ordered with images of the Shiva linga, Hanuman and Raghavendraswamy embossed on them. Replicas of the Charminar and Nirmal paintings were added to the list of gifts for the US.

This change of heart, however, did little to smooth ruffled feathers. Hyderabadi Muslims living in America viewed Rama Rao's trip as aimed at selling Hinduism. A Chicago resident, meanwhile, contacted leaders of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) in Hyderabad and invited them to Chicago. The MIM president and legislator Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi said: "All MIM legislators are planning to go there after Ramzan. It is not right for Rama Rao as chief minister to promote the Hindu dharma."

Trying to brush aside the controversy, Rama Rao countered that the copper medallions are going to be given to children to wear or preserve in their places of worship at home. "It is being given as a gift from a sanyasi," said the chief minister. Argued Janata Party leader S. Jaipal Reddy: "Rama Rao suffers from a religion fix. He cannot think and act beyond the religious images with which he is well versed. His queer obsession with religious symbolism lands him in many needless controversies."

Attempting to answer this controversy, Rama Rao declared the tour will fetch Rs 100 crore of non-resident investment for the industrial development of his state. Before departing to the US he said: "The trip is intended to make the Telugus there think of their motherland and mother state and participate in its development." The seminar-cum-workshop on "Industrial and Investment Opportunities in Andhra Pradesh" at Pittsburgh, sponsored by a non-profit organisation called the Telugu Scientists in America (TSA) is to be the pace-setter. Entrepreneurs, investors, corporations, American and Indian government agencies and financial institutions have been invited to the Pittsburgh meet.

While optimisim about the outcome of the tour is running high, earlier experiences of other states have been less than satisfactory. Delegations from Kerala and Maharashtra to the US and the Arab nations, in search of investments have yielded meagre response. Although Rama Rao's tour was preceded by preliminary discussions between seminar sponsors and possible US investors and Dr P.L. Sanjiva Reddy, managing director of the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation (APIDC) and B.B. Ramaiah, chairman, of the Andhra Pradesh State Financial Corporation, it remains to be seen whether any plans will materialise. Said a hopeful Sanjiva Reddy: "There is an unmistakable eagerness to invest in Andhra Pradesh, as they are fully convinced about the congenial climate for industrial growth and the steady supply of electricity."

Expectedly, Rama Rao's plan to woo investors is a multi-media hard sell. Printed letters to 10,000 Telugu "brothers and sisters" in America were sent out carrying his photograph and the slogan "Come, fulfil your dream and ours". Each bore the chief minister's signature in

Telugu. The letters were followed by audio-cassettes beginning with the invocation "Maa Telugu talli..." (Our Telugu Mother) and a 20-minute emotional address about Telugu history and heritage drawing heavily on his histrionic skills of changing tone, long pauses and the typical Rama Rao laugh. Films about the state and its industrial infrastructure are part of his baggage; also books on how to write Telugu, and on Telugu heritage and handicrafts. The performing arts and religious books published by the TTD are also being distributed by the chief minister on his tour.

A charge being levelled against the chief minister is that he is trying particularly to help those belonging to his community. But Bezawada Papi Reddi, chairman of the APIDC says: "It is incidental that some of those whom we are talking to are Kammas. We are not closing the doors on anyone who wants to start industries in the state. Many including Swraj Paul took licences to start industries but made no efforts." Paul's group was licensed to set up a caustic soda plant costing Rs 25 crore at Machilipatnam. Congress(I) legislator P. Govardhan Reddy alleged Rama Rao was planning to start industries in the name of his relatives and raise funds for future election campaigns. Countered Telugu Desam General Secretary P. Upendra: "Govardhan Reddy's past makes him see others in similar light. The chief minister planned this trip because Telugus abroad are keen on starting industries and hospitals in the state."

Some officials, however, are less optimistic of the outcome of this tour. Said one official: "Many of them will be willing to invest in a financial institution so that the returns can be repatriated easily and leave it to entrepreneurs to set up the industries." Two officials, T.L. Shanker, secretary, industries, and U.B. Raghavendra Rao, special secretary to the chief minister, are accompanying him. Shanker is to coordinate subjects dealing with industry and Raghavendra Rao is in charge of education, medical and health and religious endowment matters on the tour. V. Appa Rao, the deputy inspector general of police, is in charge of Rama Rao's security. There are also 30 members of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) led by its president D. Seetaramaiah.

However the FAPCCI delegation is sceptical about the outcome of this high-profile tour. Said a member of the team: "We do not share the exuberance of the chief minister about huge investments but hope to tap reliable technology to develop and expand some of our industries." As one opposition party leader said grudgingly: "Rama Rao's intention for going on such a mission is good and he cannot be accused of anything unless it turns out to be an expensive failure." That like in his movies, will have to wait till the last scene is played out.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

TELUGU DESAM

Hero Worship

THE IRONIES of politics often make interesting spectacles. Just last year, at the Vijayawada convention of the Telugu Desam, the party's chairman, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, had accused Mrs Gandhi of perpetuating family rule and centralising all decision-making. Last month, at the party's convention at Visakhapatnam, he benignly presided over adulations to himself while the party obediently left it to him "to decide at the appropriate time" such issues as whether his son-in-law, N. Chandrababu Naidu, should succeed P. Upendra as party general secretary and when the party should be expanded to other states.

Of evaluation of the party's performance or that of the Government, there was no sign. Even the stock-taking machinery set up earlier was ignored. The report of a performance appraisal committee instituted in October last by the party's state executive to oversee implementation of the party policies and programmes by the Government and also to evaluate the performance of legislators, was expected at the convention. But the only report presented, the annual report of Upendra, set the tone for the glorification of Rama Rao.

No one asked why the performance report was not presented or why elections were not being held to various offices such as that of general secretary—from which Upendra had resigned after his election to the Rajya Sabha—or to the executives of front organisations like the Telugu Yuvata, the party youth wing. Rama Rao maintained a stoic silence when delegates from Rayalaseema suggested that his son-in-law replace Upendra. But when others spoke up for Upendra's continuance, the final decision was to leave it to Rama Rao to decide.

Meanwhile, a list of dos and don'ts for the public and private lives of all legislators has been drawn up. They are not to accept private hospitality and must inform the various constituency units before they go on tour. Chandrababu's appointment as chief observer to keep a watch on partymen makes it clear that

The chief minister en route to the convention: popularity pull

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Telugu Desam men are to be kept on a tight leash.

A part of party discipline henceforth is the donning of the party colour by loyal workers on all important occasions, such as January 9, the day the Telugu Desam came to power last year, for Rama Rao's visits to their towns or districts and on the leader's birthday—which fell on May 28 (the concluding day of the convention).

So the delegates marched dutifully to the convention in yellow shirts and sarees through the 62 arches that had been set up on the roads to the venue—Sabamurthy Kala Mandir and Port Trust Grounds, renamed Gurajada Nagar after a famous Telugu playwright. Barring the arches, however, the flamboyance and pomp of Vijayawada was missing at Visakhapatnam.

The party's youth wing did its bit though, playing the adulatory role to the hilt. The young activists performed an elaborate abhishekham, breaking 62 coconuts at Rama Rao's feet on his birthday. One of them lit camphor on his palm to complete the ritual. Responding in tones of patriarchal grandeur, the party chief told them: "On your shoulders rests the prestige of the party. On you is my reliance and I am sure you will rise to the occasion. No matter how influential the ministers or others are, be critical in assessing their performance."

Earlier he ruffled the feathers of some ministers and legislators with his public criticism of them. He claimed he had reports directly from the people that the legislators were ignoring their constituencies. If such complaints continued, he threatened, he would have no hesitation in dissolving the party.

But his remarks enraged many. Two MLA's, M. Keshav Reddy and Y. Bhima Reddy, both from Anantapur district who did not attend the Mahanadu, resigned their membership of the party on June 10. Said Keshav Reddy: "Rama Rao has no respect for his legislators. He's a dictator interested in promoting his sons-in-law. He forgets several of us were elected on our own steam." At the same time, supporters of M. Ramachandra Rao, the former Labour Minister who was remvoed on charges of corruption are pressuring him to quit the party.

But at the Mahanadu, everybody eulogised Rama Rao. And the booklet of draft resolutions carried a song in praise of him on the back cover. In fact, from all indications, these gestures were more important than the resolutions tucked inside. The latter were passed almost perfunctorily—as at AICC(I) sessions.

That the resolutions were no more than paper tigers was amply evinced by the congratulatory telegrams Rama Rao sent to retired general K.V. Krishna Rao and Kona Prabhakar Rao, on their appointment as governors just three days after the convention had adopted a resolution describing the office of governor as a relic of colonialism and redundant in the Indian political system.

However, denying the lack of seriousness, Upendra, who continues to function as general secretary, claimed that the convention had cleared any misconceptions about the Desam forming an alliance with the Congress(I). Said he: "Without a single dissenting view, the party appreciated Rama Rao's efforts to forge unity among all non-Congress(I) parties." With such an appreciative audience, the former actor will no doubt go from strength to strength—within the party at any rate. —AMARNATH K.MENON

BIHAR

Crowded Out



IF EXPANDING the state Cabinet ensured the stability of his leadership, Bihar Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh would be a very happy man today. In the space of nine months, he has expanded his ministry four times. In his latest exercise on May 31, he inducted 15 more ministers—three of the cabinet rank, seven ministers of state and five deputies—pushing up its strength to a total of 40. But if anything, this made him more unpopular with a lot of his partymen. Within minutes of the swearing-in ceremony, deposed chief minister Jagannath Mishra, arch-rival of the present incumbent, thundered: "It is a sort of minority terrorism over the majority. For the first time since the S.K. Singh ministry, dissidents have been ignored as if the party and the Government were Singh's personal party."



PRABHAKAR

Singh: growing unpopularity

With Mishra claiming control of 129 party legislators, Singh could have trouble on his hands. Soon after the ceremony, the vocal former chief minister's supporters hurriedly regrouped to deal with the situation. Mishra has particular reason to be irked: all three new cabinet ministers—Shiv Chandra Jha, Dinesh Singh, and Mohammed Hussain Azad—had openly worked for his ouster just a year ago. Legislators known to be loyal to him have been side-tracked, Mishra claims. Kamlanath Singh Thakur, a Mishra supporter, says bitterly: "Those who failed to change their colours during these nine months have been ignored. Besides, regional balance has not been maintained as the chief minister has all along been working for vengeance."

The chief minister staunchly maintains that he has only gone by the image and efficiency of his men in inducting the new ministers. He adds that his sole aim is to ensure that the Government is strengthened and the administration improved. Party sources, however, say it was something of a delicate exercise: with some senior ministers refusing to shed their prestigious portfolios, Singh took nearly a week to reallocate the portfolios amongst his expanded ministry.

The dissidents were quick to denounce Singh's latest act. Gathering at the residence of former minister Rajendra Pratap Singh, they decided to send a memorandum to the party's central leadership. The memo will list the "misdeeds" of Singh, which they say will weaken the organisation. Mishra supporters say Singh is perversely shooting down all the programmes initiated by Mishra which had made him popular with the intellectuals and the poor, merely in order to humiliate the deposed chief minister. Thakur, for one, claims Singh's men tried to sabotage his election to the Darbhanga graduates constituency just because he was a Mishra supporter. He says Education Minister Nagendra Jha actually invoked the names of the prime minister and Rajiv Gandhi to get him defeated. When he won, anyway, some men were instigated to attack

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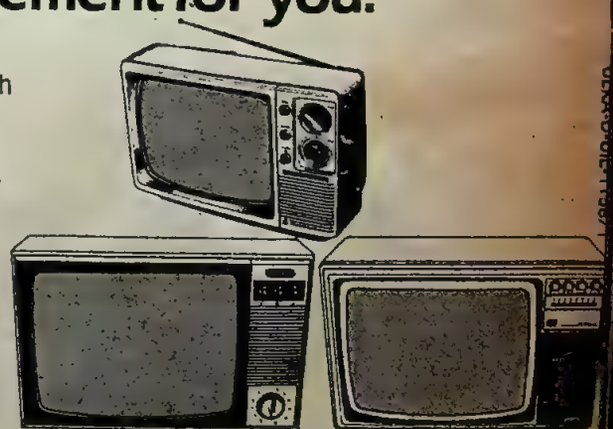
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RAJIV


K.M. KISHAN

Mishra garlands JP's bust (top); scene of an attack on Mishra at Manigachi

Mishra at Manigachi.

Mishra escaped unhurt. But he and 20 former ministers—most of them his supporters—were served notices to vacate their officially allotted houses. Mishra sees this as another attempt to humiliate him. Singh denied the charge that he was being vindictive. Later, an official spokesman confirmed that the chief minister had passed "express orders" to the effect that Mishra would not be asked to give over the house.

But that is small comfort for Mishra who sees a larger plot to discredit him. Sure enough, Singh issued orders dissolving all the district vigilance boards set up by Mishra last year to combat corruption, from July 1. Mishra had set up seven such boards, with district judges as chairmen and non-officials as members. Last fortnight this order was challenged in the high court by Brajkishore Prasad, chairman of the Bihar State Bar Council, and some other eminent lawyers. The high court has since stayed the Government's order. Mishra gloated: "It exposed how serious Singh was about the removal of corruption from the administration."

Mishra is also sorely annoyed that the 6,000 partymen attached to various committees in the district and block levels have been removed, besides legislators in charge of district 20-point programme committees. He said piously that the organisation he had built up was being "demolished" on the eve of the elections. His other grouses are that after the murderous attack on him, the Government attempted to withdraw his securitymen and transfer his private secretary to far-off Ranchi. The redoubtable former chief minister also complains that the Government is trying to take over the two educational institutions he heads. A government source, however, insists that in fact Mishra has been misusing these institutions for his own political ends.

The chief minister's supporters believe that all this righteous indignation on Mishra's part is leading up to something. They say the highly ambitious Mishra is just looking for the right provocation to quit the Congress(I) and form a regional party. Indeed, he has never lost an opportunity to barnstorm the state's farthest corners and put down Singh's government at well-attended gatherings everywhere. Most significantly, he has recently taken to eulogising the late Jayaprakash Narayan—while discreetly underscoring his loyalty to Mrs Gandhi as well. He has been telling the people he will "fulfil the dreams of the Loknayak"— under the banner of Mrs Gandhi, of course. Singh's supporters have predictably called this "anti-party". But Mishra himself says loftily that none of this is new—even as chief minister, his welfare programmes were always inspired by Jayaprakash Narayan, only he didn't disclose it then. He said: "Those who think I am leaving the party are living in a fool's paradise. The Congress(I) in Bihar is my creation, it is my own house and it is just by chance that somebody else has captured it. This does not mean that I will abandon it."

Mishra scored one in his battle with Singh when state Congress(I) chief Ram Sharan Prasad Singh sent a negative report about the functioning of the Singh Ministry to the high command two months ago. But Singh's men claim they are in the clear: Deputy Minister for Information and Power, Ranjit Sinha points out that the recent poll results indicate that the Congress(I) continues to be as popular as ever in the state. But the ever-escalating faction fight is hardly an auspicious omen for the party's chances in the upcoming general elections.

—FARZAND AHMED

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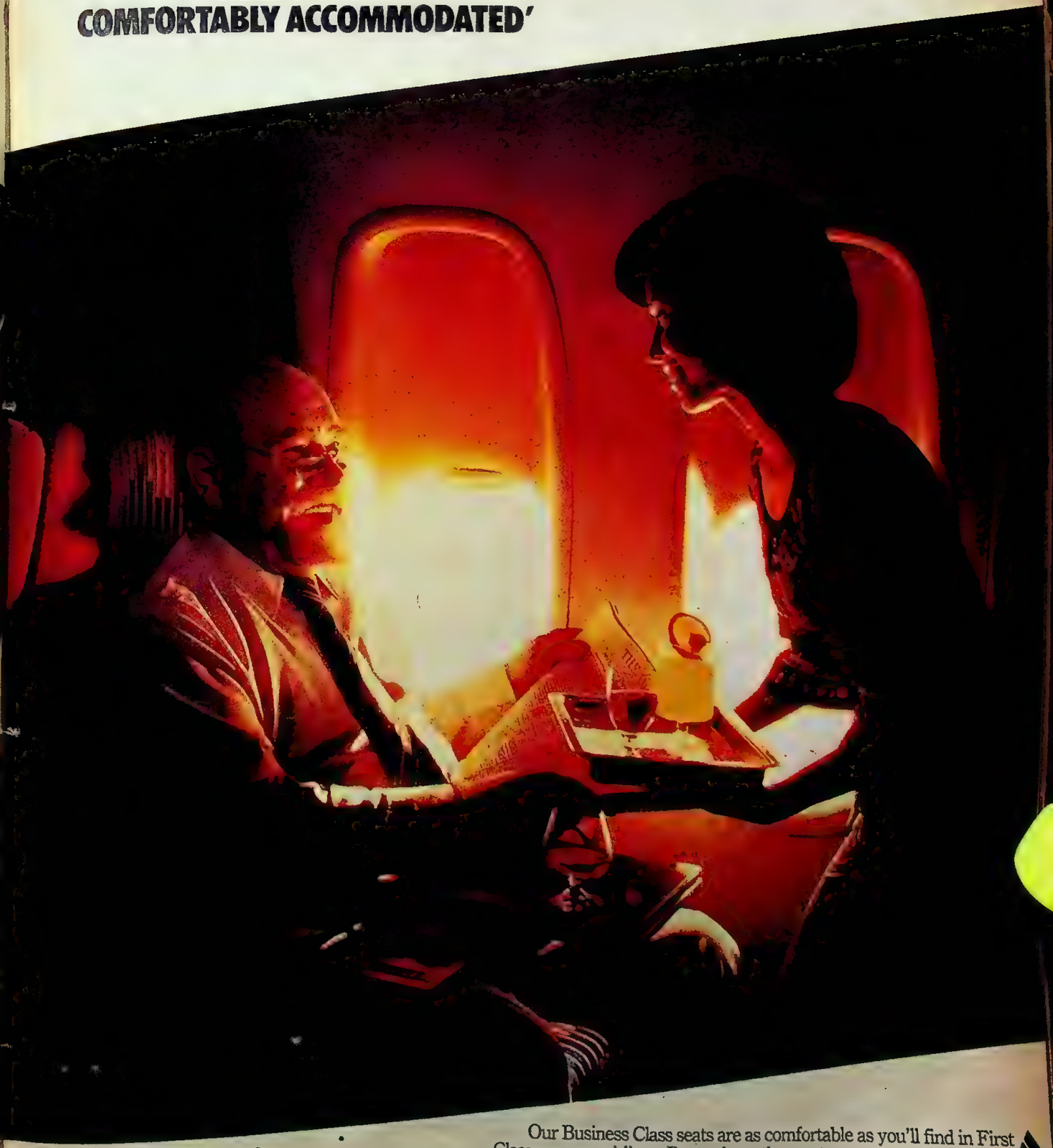
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WEST BENGAL

Politics of Delay



FIRST, the good news: Calcutta's Metro Railway will begin partial service early next month. Now, the bad news: the crucial middle section of the 17-km-long Metro tunnel will not be complete till the end of the decade. Work on the 5-km stretch between Esplanade and Shyambazar has been held up, causing major traffic dislocation and attracting considerable criticism from Calcutta's long-suffering commuters. "The middle portion of the Metro had been identified as the most difficult in the initial stages of the project and has been kept till the last," admits K.N. Dasgupta, general manager of Metro Railway. But, he adds with a hint of hope: "The Metro will be of utility even without the middle section."

Ever since work began on the country's first underground railway project in 1974, it has been undermined by problems. This time, the problem is said to be political. The delay in awarding the contract for the middle section is because of rivalry between two warring camps of the Congress(I) state unit. What complicates the issue is that both factions are led by powerful men: Railway Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury and Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Matters really came to a head when two Japanese companies responded to a world-wide tender floated by the Railway Board only to be rebuffed by an objection from the Finance Ministry.

Technically, the Japanese seemed to be the best choice for this particular contract. "The middle section of the Metro tube passes under the most important arterial road of the city, Chittaranjan Avenue," points out Dasgupta. The Japanese, with their mechanised digging and construction methods could be expected to complete the work within four years as against the eight years it would take by the manual construction methods in use in other sections. It was hoped that work on the section could begin in October 1983 and finish by mid-1987. But no contract has yet been finalised.

Last February, the Japanese Government signed a Rs 16-crore loan agreement to finance a part of the Metro project and two months later, the Railway Board floated its international tender. The bids by the two Japanese firms were processed through the railway's tender committee, finance commission board and finally the railway minister. But they were derailed as soon as they came up before the Finance Ministry. Says Choudhury: "The Finance Ministry says that according to the loan agreement with the Indian Government, Japanese companies are not entitled to use the loan." He adds that the Japanese companies insist that there is no such ban. But Choudhury himself does not say the Finance Ministry is deliberately stalling matters. "All I am saying is that we have a difference of opinion with the Finance Ministry," he says diplomatically.

Choudhury and Mukherjee: faction feud



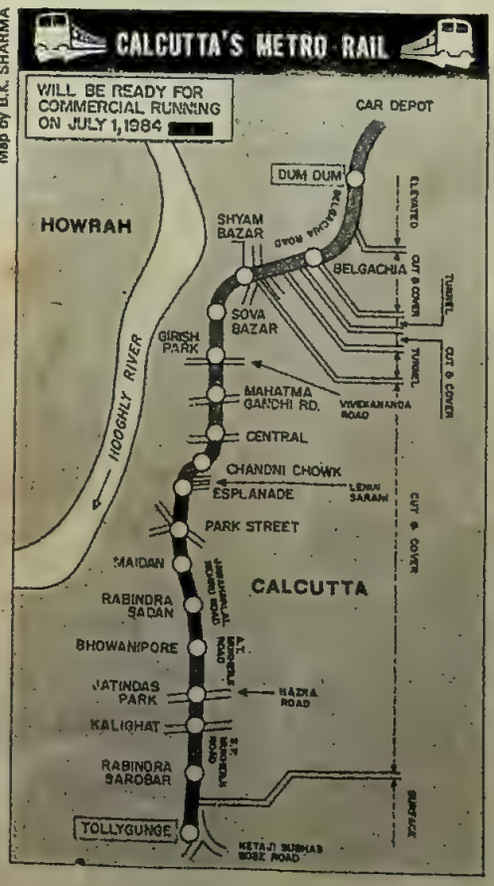


The rivalry between the two party factions has been hotting up recently. Both factions have been trying to wean away as many partymen as possible to their camps. Choudhury is in a particularly happy position because of the favourable image he has managed to build up in the state with his various popular railway schemes. He has introduced several new passenger trains, pushed through the circular railway project for Calcutta and managed liberal financial allocations to the Metro Railway project — Rs 80 crore for 1984. According to a railway official close to the railway minister, the Finance Ministry tried to stonewall the circular railway project initially. But the first phase is already complete, and partial services are expected to begin by August 15 this year.

Metro officials, however, stoutly deny that politics has anything to do with the delay. In fact, Dasgupta believes that the contract will be finalised any time now. He expects that the 8-km stretch between Esplanade and Tollygunge will be complete by the end of next year, and the 2.5- km Belgachia northern section by the end of this year. But although the financial problems that hobbled the project in the early stages have been largely eliminated, other problems still persist. Land acquisition continues to be a major hurdle, and contractors are constantly accused of mismanagement. This could complicate work on the crucial middle section for the Japanese as well.

But even if the completion of the middle section is pushed beyond the expected period of a decade, the average Calcuttan will probably bear with it as stoically as he has for the past 10 years. Meanwhile, he will have to make do with a 4-km Metro ride that will cost a rupee per ticket.

— INDRANIL BANERJIE





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THE STATESMAN

A boat in a waterlogged Calcutta street

CALCUTTA

The Deluge

MISERY reigned as Calcutta went under water and stayed submerged for nearly 72 hours last fortnight. But even amid the anguish, anger seethed as irate Calcuttans demanded to know what had become of the Rs 40 crore that has been spent in the last decade to arrange for swift drainage. As the huge storm water outlet pipes, which had been laboriously laid over the years, remained completely ineffective, word came from the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority that the work had actually remained incomplete: the pipes had not been connected to any outlet.

For people wading through chest high water in the dark, the snapped electric wires and open manholes became veritable death-traps. At least 25 deaths occurred, most of them by drowning in manholes. The manholes were opened by the Government to drain the water but no steps were taken to caution pedestrians. As a municipal officer admitted with somewhat macabre callousness, "the death figure could possibly be higher as bodies might be lying stuck in the underground silt".

The floods had their genesis in the 213.6 mm of rain that lashed Calcutta on June 5. As the rain gained in intensity and the water level rose, the most hard-pressed were people living in low-lying areas of eastern Calcutta such as Topsia, Kasba and Tiljala. In hundreds and thousands, they began evacuating homes.

Some found shelter—in school buildings or police stations. But for most, the only shelter was on some points of high land where they sat day and night in the open in the continuous downpour. It was two days before government relief in the form of dry food and medicine began to trickle in for the nearly 1 lakh people who had been left homeless.

Elsewhere in the city, conditions were hardly better. Rain water seeped into the underground cables, leaving 16,000 telephones dead even days after the rain had stopped. For two days, large parts of the city were in total darkness as the flood water played havoc with transformers and the distribution system. With no trains plying and no supplies coming in from the districts, the city markets went dry. Potatoes sold for Rs 10 a kg and eggs for over a rupee each. The Government for its part failed to keep milk supply going.

In fact, as the calamity struck with all its ferocity, the first to disappear from the scene were public utility services. On June 5 and 6 as thousands stood on the roads trying to get to work, they found hardly any means of transport. The Calcutta State Transport Corporation had withdrawn its entire fleet of about 650 buses from the roads on the plea that "exposure to rain would damage the vehicles". Private transport operators however proved more public-spirited and maintained some kind of a service, their buses and taxis often wading through chest high water.

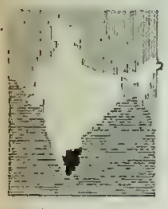
Similarly, frantic calls for help from people marooned in the northern and eastern suburbs to the fire brigade and police generally fell on deaf ears. The authorities argued that "the huge downpour caught us as off guard as the common people". As a result, to cite just one instance, Ranjit Sinha Roy, a resident of central Calcutta, watched the body of a young man floating on the flooded streets outside his house for over ten hours before the ambulance men responded to repeated phone calls to come and take the body away.

To add to their plight, Calcuttans were plagued once again by an old problem, the appalling sewerage system. The underground sewers are clogged with an estimated deposit of 2.3 million cu ft of silt and are capable of carrying only a quarter inch of rain in an hour. The only answer seems to be larger sewers but as Minister for Urban Development Prasanta Sur pointed out, the Government just does not have the Rs 1,200 crore that would be needed to replace the sewerage system. So there seems to be no escape from submergence in dirty water every time it rains a little harder than usual.

—SUMANTA SEN

TAMIL NADU

Smoke Signals



POLITICS makes strange bedfellows, they say. In Tamil Nadu, it makes even stranger divorces and quite astonishing remarriages. The relationship of the Congress(I) and the AIADMK is a case in point. Having forged an alliance for the 1977 parliamentary polls and parted ways when the latter flirted with the Janata Party two years later, they came together again for last month's by-elections.

But judging by the straws in the wind—some blowing all the way from New Delhi—their second honeymoon may already be over. The big question is: will the Congress(I) continue the alliance for the parliamentary poll a few months hence or switch to the AIADMK's arch-rival, the DMK? Or decide to get it alone?

Madras was abuzz last fortnight with speculation after Congress(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi stated that "we will not enter into alliances with any regional parties". That was closely followed by a congratulatory message from Mrs Gandhi to DMK President M. Karunanidhi on his 61st birthday on June 3.

Yet, just a few days earlier, Defence Minister R. Venkataraman had enthused in Madras that "the alliance between the Congress(I) and the AIADMK will continue for ever". However, going by the internal power structure of the Congress(I), most people tended to take Rajiv's policy pronouncements rather more seriously.

Certainly, the normally bellicose AIADMK president, Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, responded in conciliato-

AMITABH BACHCHAN

Accident-prone

ILL HEALTH and accidents just seen to haunt Amitabh Bachchan, the country's top-ranking film star. Exactly two years ago, he met with a near-fatal abdominal injury which kept him on the critical list for over a month. Last year while celebrating Diwali with his family in Delhi, he burnt his palms badly. And last week, the lanky superstar was back at his old hospital room no. 317 at the exclusive Breach Candy Hospital, Bombay, for treatment of a rare muscle disease, myasthenia gravis. Again this time it was clear that he would have to opt out of his shootings for at least a while.

The star himself took a gloomy view. Clearly depressed, he confided to *Times of India* correspondent, Khalid Mohammed: "I know I am quite ill. It doesn't look as if I will ever be able to face the camera again." He added wryly: "Anyway people are getting fed up of me doing the same role over and over again, aren't they?" His confession stunned the Bombay film industry which had until then believed that Bachchan had been admitted into the hospital for routine checks because of exhaustion. Producer Manmohan Desai, who has been shooting with Bachchan for his film *Mard* in Bangalore and Mysore for the last month, said: "The newspaper reports are just sensationalistic. To the best of my knowledge he is merely suffering from overwork. I did not detect anything particularly wrong during our shooting in the south."

However, a team of specialists has confirmed the diagnosis of myasthenia, an illness characterised by muscular



Bachchan on the sets of *Mard*

weakness due to a breakdown in the linkage between the nervous system and muscles. Myasthenia, according to a doctor treating the star, is often triggered off by trauma or exhaustion.

In the initial stages of myasthenia the patient's eye movements, facial expressions, chewing, swallowing and respiration are affected, later the disease spreads to the neck, trunk, limbs and heart muscles. Strong drugs are however, usually able to check the disability. Initial reports from the hospital say that Bachchan is responding "fairly well" to the treatment, though the fact that he is asthmatic is a complication. "The disease is not necessarily progressively degenerative, at times there can be long remissions when it goes away completely. There is no reason why he should not return to films after a while," said a doctor attending on the ailing actor.

Bachchan felt the first symptoms of his ailment a month ago in Bangalore on the sets of *Mard*. He developed a pain in the knee, a stinging sensation in the eye, a throat infection and was generally fatigued. But he knew something was really wrong in Mysore when he had trouble just drinking a glass of water, with the liquid trickling down his face. Two doctors were summoned, and he was flown to Bombay.

The 15-odd producers who have signed the superstar for forthcoming productions are understandably jittery. Most have borrowed at the prohibitively high interest rates common in the industry and have paid Bachchan advance money running into several lakhs. However, only two films starring him are actually shooting; *Mard* which is over half complete, and a film by south Indian producer Purna Chandra Rao.

Speculation that Bachchan's ailment could be disastrous for the industry of which he has been the leading light for the last 10 years, were downplayed by Bombay film producers. "The heavens are not going to fall if films are delayed for a little while, Bachchan should rest until he is completely fit. He has been overtaxing himself," said Desai. Producer G.P. Sippy agreed: "The industry is able to adjust itself to such occurrences. I am sure he will be able to return to work in another two months."

Even before his illness, however, Bachchan had in a recent interview indicated that the Bombay film world was due for some changes because of a general slump. Apart from *Coolie* none of his recent films have been outstanding successes. The ratings of Prakash Mehra's *Sharaabi* at the box-office have so far been nearly adequate rather than spectacular. "Now a lot of films are being produced and a lot of them, mine included, are not doing so well. All this does provide a bit of a crunch on the finances of the industry as a whole," Bachchan had observed. Though unintended, that statement has now assumed an almost prophetic tone.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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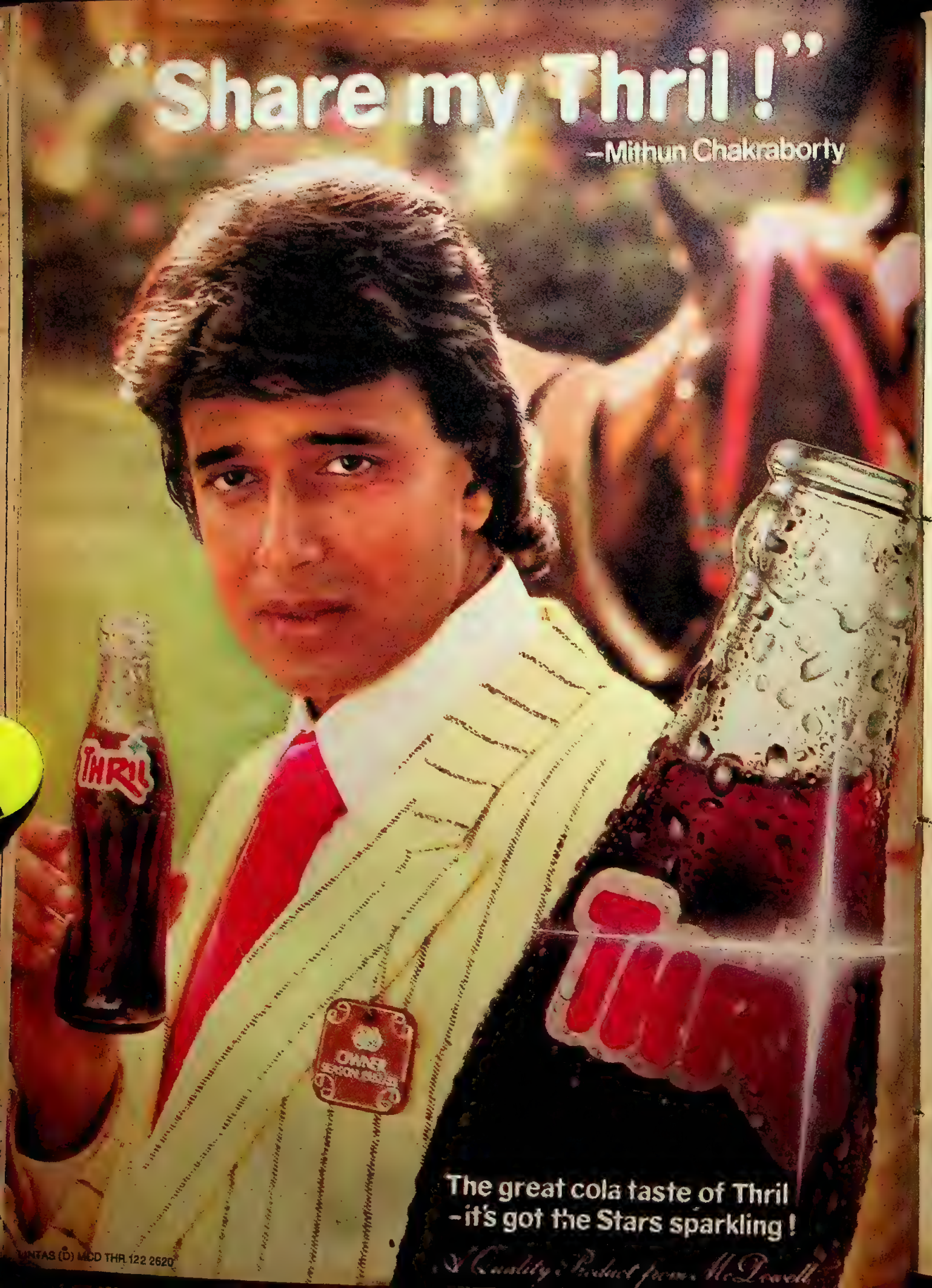
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ry tones. Said he: "I do not know in what context Rajiv Gandhi said that the Congress(I) would not have any truck with regional parties. The AIADMK is not a regional party but an all-India party having representatives in the Lok Sabha and even in the Karnataka Assembly."

Ramachandran is worried, and with reason. "We have been wounded in the by-elections," says party general secretary P.U. Shanmugham. In fact if the party had contested alone in a triangular contest last month, the DMK would most likely have swept the polls. A chastened Ramachandran has publicly vowed to cleanse his party of "racketeers, liquor barons and capitalists".

The Congress(I) has almost as much cause for worry as the chief minister. Since it lost power in Tamil Nadu in 1967, it has contested under its own steam in only two by-elections, in 1982 and 1983. Both the candidates lost their deposits. For the rest, it has always seen fit to combine with one of the two dominant regional parties. Now its strategy seems to be to keep both parties guessing.

Judging by the by-election results, the DMK seems a safer bet for a ride to the victory post. But the Congress(I), having proved itself a fickle partner, may not find a very warm welcome from the DMK ranks. Karunanidhi did respond encouragingly enough to Mrs Gandhi's birthday greetings by omitting any derogatory remarks against the party at the mammoth public meeting his party organised in Madras to felicitate him.

But his lieutenants do not mince words about the Congress(I). Assistant General Secretary Nanchil Manoharan, for instance, says: "That party has no principles. Twice it entered into an alliance with our party, once during the 1970 general elections and then again during the 1980 parliamentary and assembly elections. On both occasions, it pulled out. I do not think we can have anything to do with that party any more."

That may not be necessary. "It appears that the party may ultimately decide to remain alone and not have an alliance with either the AIADMK or the DMK," says K. Jayaveerapandian, former Tamil Nadu Youth Congress(I) president and an important leader of the Shivaji Ganesan group. Rajiv himself has consistently leaned toward this option. Even before the by-elections, he told a press conference at Tiruchi that "our party would like to go it alone in the elections".

However, "in the national interest" — as Rajiv later put it — the alliance was formed. When a reporter asked the general secretary whether the alliance would continue for the general elections, his enigmatic reply was: "Well, let us wait and see." That instruction, apparently, still holds good. —S.H. VENKATRAMANI

VIP TOURS

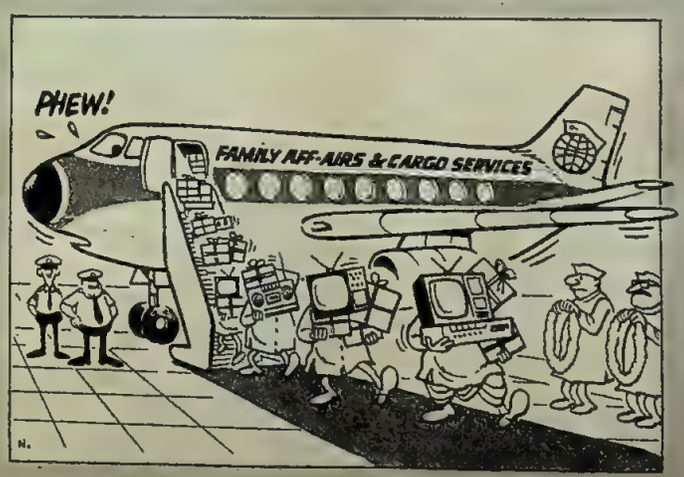
Shopping Sprees

IT IS an open secret among diplomats in Washington that Mrs Gandhi's retinue during the prime minister's visit in August 1982 went on an apparently insatiable shopping binge. In fact, two extra buses had to be chartered at government expense to carry the TVs and videos and electronic gifts to the airplane departing from Washington at the end of her visit.

President Zail Singh's hangers-on seem determined not to be outdone by the prime minister's big spenders. When Singh arrived in Houston in October 1982, on a specially-chartered Air-India plane for his heart surgery, he was accompanied by about 40 people including relatives, officials and chaprassis. The peons had specialised duties: one had the sole job of carrying the President's thermos flask, the other, the President's brief-case.

They were given luxurious accommodation in Houston and their every gastronomical and consumer whim catered to. En route to America — during a stopover in London — several boxes of champagne and caviar, ordered well in advance, were loaded on to the plane. And in Houston they ate to their hearts content. The President, ordered by his doctors to have a light meal on the night of the operation, insisted on, and was provided tandoori chicken.

Two weeks after the successful surgery, doctors pronounced Zail Singh fit to travel home. But his travelling companions would have none of it. They persuaded the President to delay his departure by a week so they could romp a little more and he agreed to their request.



The taxi bill alone for these three weeks came to a whopping $80,000 (Rs 8 lakh). But that was hardly the end. The President's party 'convinced' Zail Singh to delay their departure by yet another week so they could go shopping in New York. And to the city of Gotham they all headed for another week of luxury hotels and shopping. Tired but happy, they headed back to India bursting with videos and TVs and other electronic goodies.

In April this year, the President, accompanied by the same 40-odd people, visited South America. But before going there, the President's party made a stopover in Orlando, Florida. The reason: the President and his jet setting party wanted to see Disneyland. And Disneyland they saw. Their one-day tour of Mickey Mouse's fabled home cost the Indian taxpayer $8,000 (Rs 80,000). The Indian embassy had provided several limousines for the visiting dignitaries. One of the limos was arbitrarily expropriated by the President's teen-age grandson with a flourish of droit de-Rashtrapati Bhawan. Both the Indian chief of protocol who accompanied Singh and Natwar Singh whose limo the presidential sibling had taken, had to ride buses.

By the end of the day the party was so exhausted that only eight of them showed up for a gala dinner paid for and organised by the Indian mission in Washington.

There's more. The President's peripatetic party returned from Latin America to holiday for a day in Los Angeles. From there they holidayed in Hawaii before departing for India — but not before a final shopping stopover in Hong Kong.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR in Washington

MAHARASHTRA

Battle Lines



MORE than 20 days after the appalling Bombay riots, dust was still to settle on some of the controversies they kicked up. Fast moving events in Punjab eclipsed opposition demands for Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil's ouster, and communal militant leader Bal Thackeray of the Shiv Sena earned a respite from the threatened prosecution on grounds of inciting violence, but within the Congress(I) itself the battle lines were drawn between party functionaries and Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr Lalitha Rao. Accusing the minister of fomenting trouble between the police and citizens of the Cheetah resettlement camp near Trombay, Congress(I) officials last fortnight demanded her dismissal on the charge that she was responsible for police firing which resulted in eight deaths. At the Bombay Regional Congress Committee(I) (BRCC-I) office members of the party's minorities cell hauled Rao over the coals before AICC(I) General Secretary Chandulal Chandrakar: they insisted that she had encouraged the Cheetah camp police contingent to harass local party workers opposed to her, causing the confrontation and ultimate carnage. Said Professor Javed Khan, chairman of the BRCC's minorities cell: "There was just no tension in the colony, even though it is a Muslim-dominated area with less than 20 per cent Hindus. Yet the minister visited the police station three times and demanded preventive arrests of partymen who she was against, and with her blessings the police finally went on the rampage."

Functionaries of the Trombay Taluka Congress Committee and party workers in Cheetah camp allege that Rao's animosity towards residents of the resettlement colony dates back to at least six months. Elected to the Legislature from Trombay constituency, which includes the roughly 40,000-strong Cheetah community, the minister has recently faced opposition from party workers for not fulfilling campaign promises, and specifically ignoring a long-standing demand for a graveyard. Since January, her meetings in the area have been heckled, and she has faced black flag demonstrations a number of times. Rao reacted to the revolt among her partymen by enlisting police support: at least thrice since January the local leadership has been rounded up for brief spells in the lock-up following the minister's public meetings. "In January she told us that she owed us nothing for her victory in the assembly elections, and since then she has worked openly against us with the help of the police," said Mohammad Ali Washi, a Cheetah resident who is vice-chairman of the BRCC minorities cell, "again at 11.30 on the night of May 22 she asked the police to arrest us, so the next day they took advantage of her protection and opened fire even though there was no provocation."



Cheetah camp residents (below) and Lalitha Rao (right): mutual antipathy

Last fortnight she made no secret of her antipathy for Congress(I) workers in Cheetah camp, though she insisted it was because they were antisocials involved in racketeering. Admitting that she has repeatedly asked for the arrest of some ring leaders in the campaign against her, she nevertheless insisted that the local police was "hand in glove" with the residents and let them off the hook each time. Alleging that there was certainly some kind of a nexus, Rao said: "Since January I have been telling the police to take action, I have even asked Police Commissioner Ribeiro to enquire into one incident but I have not heard from him till today. That means the police are hand in glove with these antisocial elements there."

Warding off charges that she was in any way responsible for the firing of May 23, Rao added yet another dimension to the Cheetah camp controversy when she charged Bombay BJP President Hashu Advani with causing the riot by holding a peace meeting in the slum. The minister went on to argue strongly that there was peace in the camp and the BJP leader's professed "peace meeting" only served to inflame passions, leaving the field open to "antisocial" Congress(I) workers like Harun Sanjar, Vakil Khan and Mohammad Ali Washi to create a riot.

By fortnight's end the Cheetah camp controversy had degenerated into a bizarre welter of charges and countercharges which drew in police officials, Congress workers, the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The few stark facts which emerged from the confused mass of accusation, however, suggested that the incident had little to do with communal passions or the riots which engulfed nearby Govandi and Shivajinagar. No incident had taken place in Cheetah camp even five days after the Bhiwandi riots erupted; even after the supposed riot and police firing of May 23 not one of the severely outnumbered Hindus camplained of communal violence; and notwithstanding police reports to the contrary, no evidence of mob violence or arson has come to light. The Bombay riots, on other hand, offered an opportunity for settling scores in the faction-ridden Congress(I).

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH



CHANDER UDAY SINGH

SIKKIM

Stormy Weather

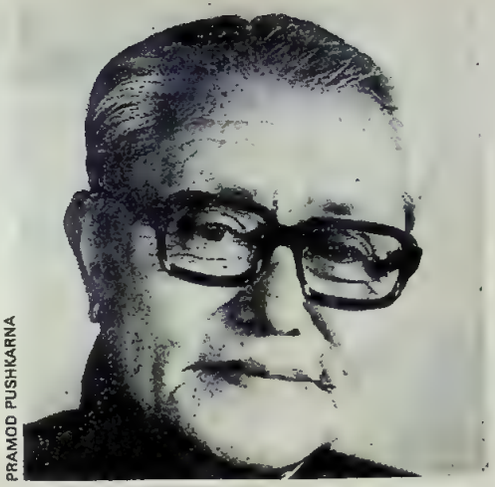


SELDOM has the ruling party been forced to pay such a heavy political price and in so bewilderingly short a time. By last fortnight, the Congress(I) found itself floundering helplessly in the sensitive border state of Sikkim clutching at straws after not just losing an elected state government but having been reduced to a political nonentity. With assembly elections in the state due later this year, the situation could hardly have been grimmer. In a bid to save face, the party high command has been sending frantic feelers to those political elements it had dropped ignominiously barely a few years ago. Admitted Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, All India Congress Committee(I) (AICC-I) general secretary: "There is need to strengthen the party unit in the state. We are considering the possibility of inducting new people to make the state Congress(I) more broad-based and representative."

That is clearly easier said than done. Ousted chief minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari, still smarting from the shock of his dismissal, has dealt the party a veritable death-blow by walking out with 17 of the 26 Congress(I) MLA's and over 90 per cent of the party's office-bearers to form his own Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP). Bhandari enjoys the support of a majority of Nepalis which further narrows down the Congress(I) options.

The first to answer the Congress(I) call was Kazi Lendhup Dorji, 85, the ageing former chief minister who had once fought the Congress(I)'s battles with the late Chogyal and who had lost the chief ministership to Bhandari in 1979. Kazi has been leading his own Sikkim United Council (SUC) since but with diminishing clout.

The signs of desperation were everywhere. Even as Congress(I) loyalists like B.B. Gurung, who created history of sorts by remaining as chief minister after Bhandari's ouster for less than a week, airdashed to Delhi to try and retain control of the state's party organisation. Kazi was summoned to the capital as well. In fact, he was as eager to reunite with the Congress(I) as the party high command was. In a letter to Mrs Gandhi dated May 27, he had written: "We request you to admit us and provide suitable responsibilities keeping in view our past experience."



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Kazi Lendhup: mutual benefits

Although there are reservations about Kazi's admission and effectiveness, a section of the ruling party seems to have convinced the high command that he alone can counter Bhandari. They argue that while Bhandari has only pockets of influence among the Nepalis, Kazi is respected by the entire non-Nepali population. In fact, in Gurung, Kazi has a vociferous supporter. "Kazi is an old-timer and as dynamic as before. We fought the Chogyal together," Gurung said, adding, "we have left the question of leadership to Mrs Gandhi."

But Kazi's new link-up with the Congress(I), will certainly mar the party's chances of roping in other regional parties. The high command had mooted the idea of the SUC, C.B. Rai's Sikkim Himali Council, and P.C. Poudyal's Congress(R) abandoning their regional identities and merging into the state unit of the Congress(I). The talks however fell through: Poudyal wanted to retain his party's regional flavour, while Kazi demanded leadership of the entire grouping. Besides, Gurung and Poudyal are sworn enemies. Charged Gurung, "Poudyal is ambitious, too young and communally-inclined. He may command some following of Nepalis, but not of Lepchas and Bhutias." Poudyal, in turn, lashed out at Gurung, "Bhandari, despite faults, was a hundred times better than Gurung who has changed parties 13 times in the past 22 years."

Both Gurung and Poudyal met the Congress(I) top brass, including Mrs Gandhi, general secretaries Rajiv Gandhi, Bajpai, G.K. Moopanar, and various other Central ministers. During discussions, the Sikkim leaders made it clear that they would be able to fight Bhandari only if he was kept on the run. Congress(I) sources revealed that the CBI raids on Bhandari's residence, preceded by an orchestrated campaign of corruption charges against him, were part of the political strategy.

Bhandari responded by organising public meetings and launching virulent attacks on Mrs Gandhi and the Centre. He charged that "the people of Sikkim are not with the Congress(I), which could not keep the government of Gurung going for even a few days. The Congress(I) has lost credibility as a democratic force in the state. It is the Sikkimese people who will run the state, not nominated subedars of the Centre."

Taking his cue from other regional parties like the Akali Dal, the Telugu Desam, and the AIADMK, Bhandari has made Centre-state relations his major election platform. He declared: "It must be decided once and for all whether an elected chief minister can be sacked by a nominated governor. Can an agent of the ruling party at the Centre negate the people's mandate? Sikkim will give a positive answer to these questions very soon."

— PRABHU CHAWLA

MADHYA PRADESH

Crucial Trial



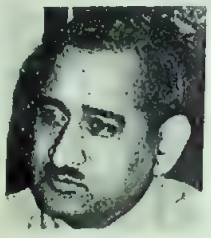
THE TRIAL of former chief minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Virendra Kumar Saklecha charged with corruption when holding office during the Janata regime, is scheduled to begin in the first week of July. But even as Special Judge L.J. Mandlik charged Saklecha under Section 5 (1) (e) and Section 5 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, late last month, the stage was clearly set for a politically crucial trial.

The court proceedings could vitally affect the fortunes of the state's two major parties — the Congress(I) and BJP — as the election draws near. Even so the Madhya Pradesh Government seems determined to leave no stone unturned in its search for a conviction. It proposes to examine more than 300 witnesses and tender more than 800 documents in evidence, before a ruling is given on the case for which the charge-sheet was lodged in court on February 8, 1983 (INDIA TODAY, February 28, 1983).

During his two years and seven months in power — first as minister of industry for seven months and the remaining time as chief minister — he is alleged

to have accumulated wealth disproportionate to his known source of income. According to the charge-sheet, Saklecha has acquired assets and incurred expenditure to the tune of a colossal Rs 57.61 lakh. Of this amount Rs 30.66 lakh is said to have been made during his years in power while the remaining Rs 26.95 lakh is a "spillover of assets acquired during the check period".

Further, in a surprise move which went somewhat unreported, on August 4 last year the Special Public Prosecutor, Dharmendra Verma, moved an application in Mandlik's court under the Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, 1944, against Saklecha. The prosecution sought and obtained an ad interim order permitting attachment of Saklecha's properties, which are in his own or his family's names. This includes:



Saklecha: trial

- fifteen fixed time deposits of Rs 6,35,320.25;
- National Development Bonds of Rs 1,22,500;
- twenty-eight savings and current accounts of Rs 44,976.51;
- Rs 2,25,000, the total investments at nine places towards the bookings of real estate, including commercial flats;
- forty-eight batches of shares in companies worth Rs 8,95,850.50;
- immovable property consisting of seven plots and flats valued at Rs 6,92,809.25;
- investments of Rs 21,83,825 in three family concerns; and
- units in the Unit Trust of India of Rs 43,340.

Legally, the prosecution will have to prove that Saklecha, a public servant, in his or someone else's name held property that was not in proportion to his known source of income, whereas the defence, on the other hand, will have to show that he has a satisfactory explanation or perhaps other sources of income not taken into account by the prosecution. Already objections have been put forward by his counsel, which are likely to prolong the battle. The counsel contends that contrary to Section 5-A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, which mentions the rank of the officers who will investigate the case, there were no documents on record to show that the proper authorisation had been issued to officers working on the case, and therefore the investigation itself amounted to nothing.

On May 11, the court admitted certain documents placed by the prosecution to show that the investigating officers had indeed been authorised as required under Section 5-A. The defence's objection to this on the grounds that the documents be ignored since they could not be admitted at this stage was overruled. On May 23, Mandlik pronounced that sufficient grounds existed for framing charges against Saklecha who was then not present, to which Saklecha moved an application saying that the process of framing of charges itself be postponed since he had gone in revision to the high court against Mandlik's orders. His plea was turned down. Sakhlecha then insisted that since the charges were not specific and did not disclose details of the property in his or his family members' possession, and he himself was not given a chance to explain matters during the investigation, the whole proceedings were not in accordance with the law.

Saklecha's political carreer is at stake. Whichever way the court decides the predictable mud-slinging during the trial is bound to affect him. Says an irate Saklecha: "The motive is to keep me occupied and on the defensive. Instead of appointing a judicial commission, as is normal, a police case has been made out directly precisely for this reason. It is violation of existing political norms. But in the public, this has aroused sympathy for me and for the party."

He also happens to be in the unenviable position of having his authority in the party state unit undermined by leader Sunderlal Patwa leader of the opposition. Obviously, it is going to take quite some handling on Saklecha's part if he is going to resolve his problems—legal and political—and come out unscathed.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

KERALA

The Poti Poser



EACH time Padmanabhan Subramanian Poti, chief justice, Gujarat High Court, comes home to Kerala on vacation, he gives the state Government the jitters. Last fortnight was no exception. Poti's controversial statements created enough waves among political circles to the extent that the Congress(I) in the state has been calling furiously for his resignation while the CPI(M) and other opposition parties have rallied determinedly to his support.

The debate was set off by Poti's comments on the issues of the Muslim shariat (personal) law and Centre-state relations, in speeches made at seminars organised by feeder units of the CPI(M) in Trivandrum. At the A.K. Gopalan Study and Research Centre seminar on Centre-state relations, Poti was critical of the use of constitutional provisions for intervention by the Centre in state affairs. In another speech at the Council of Advocates for Peoples' Causes (CAPC), he criticised the Muslim personal law, stressing the need for a uniform civil code and equal rights for women. He said that questions of succession, marriage and divorce were purely temporal in character, not related to religion. He urged that such matters be governed by laws allowing no room for exploitation of women and uniformly applicable to all. Significantly in the first instance, his views were quite similar to the views expressed by the CPI(M), and in the second he appeared to be echoing the sentiments of CPI(M) general secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

The first salvo in the fracas involving law, religion and politics was fired a few months ago by Home Minister Vayalar Ravi, a known Poti-baiter. On that occa-



Poti: making waves

sion, Ravi attacked Poti and the judiciary. Following his recent remarks, Ravi charged; "Poti has become a mouthpiece of the CPI(M). He should have refrained from expressing his views on controversial subjects in public." Ravi made it a point to underline the fact that both speeches were made on the platforms of feeder organisations of the CPI(M).

Chief Minister Karunakaran joined


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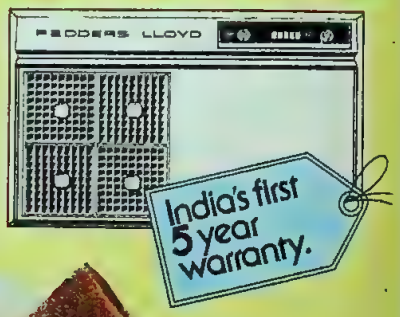
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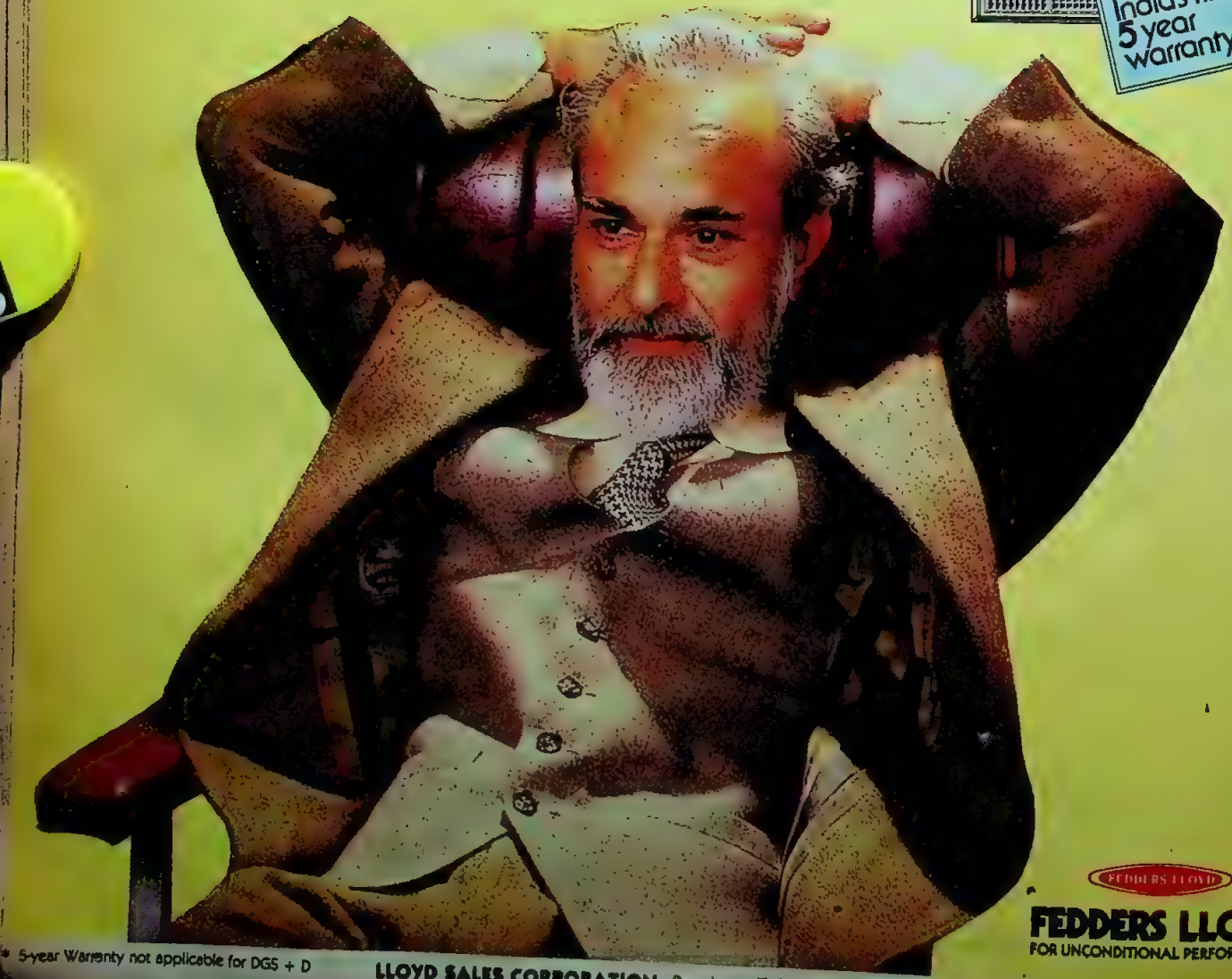
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the fray by saying it would create a bad precedent if judicial officers participated in meetings organised by political parties or their units. His association with Poti, however, and his animosity towards the chief justice, goes back to the infamous Rajan case of the Emergency, when Poti's judgement went against Karunakaran. While Karunakaran is said to have been instrumental in getting Poti transferred to the Gujarat High Court, the latter rarely misses an opportunity to embarrass the Congress(I)-led front.

Muslim leaders have predictably been upset by Poti's remarks. Says Industry Minister E. Ahmed: "Poti has wounded the feelings of the Muslim community and his observations go against the religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution."

Congress(I) leaders lost no time in pouncing on Poti, demanding his resignation. Youth Congress(I) leader G. Karthikeyan said sarcastically: "Since there is a dearth of leadership in the CPI(M), Poti should resign and join the Marxist party in Kerala." Poti remains unfazed by the angry reaction. "Everyone has the right to call for changes in the Constitution and in these seminars I was just expressing my views on certain sensitive issues," he says blandly. Refuting the charge that he had gone to the AKG Centre—state headquarters of the CPI(M)—simply to air his controversial opinions, a perfectly poised Poti pointed out that he had, in fact, made the remarks at the University Students' Centre in Trivandrum.

But the manner in which the CPI(M) and all the opposition parties in the state have unanimously decided to back Poti certainly places the chief justice in an awkward position. Claims firebrand Marxist leader M.V. Raghavan: "The Congress(I) wants to crucify Poti and whip up Muslim communalism. Karunakaran and his cohorts are taking revenge on Poti." Adds CPI leader N.E. Balaram: "There is nothing wrong in the judge's demand for legal reforms. They could bring in some welcome changes."

Poti himself refuses to change his tune or be cowed down. "I will not resign to oblige anybody," he said, adding that at this time, he had no intentions of joining any political party. "I cannot say about the future," Poti added, "but right now, after retirement, I want to practice in the Supreme Court." Whatever the future holds for Subramanian Poti, at this moment he draws more attention at all functions and seminars he attends than any politician in the state.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

KERALA

Storm Warning



IN THE last few years, the traditional fishermen who ply their country-made boats along the Kerala coast have observed their dwindling catches in dismay. Their resultant anger has been directed mainly at the owners of mechanised trawlers. With their highly efficient purse-seine nets the trawlers have been reaping rich marine harvests at the cost of the traditional fishermen. The outcome was inevitable. Last fortnight the fishermen's agitation for implementation of marine fishing regulations erupted into violence with nine mechanised fishing boats set ablaze.



SIVARAM STUDIO



Kochery (left) and agitating fisherwomen: fighting powerful interests

The fishermen's agitation, which is led by Father Thomas Kochery of the Redemptorist Fathers' Order, has bewildered the politicians and the church hierarchy of the state. Kochery has organised the fishermen under the All-Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilai Federation (AKSMTF). He is aided by a group of militant Catholic priests and nuns. Sister Alice, one of the nuns, has begun a hunger strike in Calicut and other nuns and priests have joined the fast in Quilon and Trivandrum. Recently fisherwomen and nuns paralysed road and rail traffic near Trivandrum for hours in support of the AKSMTF demands.

The involvement of the clergy has embarrassed both Chief Minister Karunakaran, who handles the fisheries portfolio, as well as the traditionally anti-communist church which supports his government. The powerful Catholic Bishops Conference, which has so far maintained a studied silence on the subject, has begun a conclave at Kottayam to discuss the religious fall-out of the agitation. Not since the church helped to bring down Kerala's first communist government 25 years ago have there been so many clerical personalities involved in an agitation.

Kochery and his AKSMTF had first organised the fishermen in 1981 to agitate against the then CPI government's order allowing fishing by mechanised boats (INDIA TODAY, August 15, 1981). At that time the Government had failed to implement the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1980. The act lays down that purse-seine nets should be barred from operation within 22 km of the coast. The mechanised boat owners took their case to the high court, which reduced this limit to 10 km. The Government also ordered a ban on trawling for *karikkadi* prawns during the monsoon, the breeding season. But a week later under pressure from the powerful mechanised Boat Owners Association the order was withdrawn, which led to renewed agitation by AKSMTF.

In a settlement that followed later, a commission with top bureaucrat Babu Paul as chairman was set up to look into the measures needed. Paul submitted his report last year. In it he suggested among other things a ban on the use of purse-seine and mid-water trawl nets, strict implementation of the Fishing Regulation Act and a ban on the use of Chinese nets within 3 km of harbour areas. Commission members disagreed on the issue of banning trawling during the monsoon, with the majority opposing a ban.

With its continued demand for a ban on trawling during the monsoon and implementation of the rest of the Paul Commission report, the AKSMTF soon became a

thorn in Chief Minister Karunakaran's side. To try and neutralise it he allegedly influenced the Latin Catholic bishops to float a splinter group under Father Albert Paruyuvila. Kochery's group is independent of the church hierarchy and is trying to enrol fishermen from all communities as its members, while Paruyuvila's group is made up of only Latin Catholics.

The divisive efforts of Karunakaran and the Latin Catholic bishops have resulted in bloody clashes. At present the Kochery group is better organised and is also alleged to be more violent. Accusations that his behaviour is not fitting for a man of the cloth are brushed aside by Kochery. Says he: "I may stand for leftist ideology but that does not mean I am an atheist. The priests and nuns who are with me are not only religious but also duty-bound to these poor fishermen." Kochery, known in the coastal villages as Naxal *achan* (Naxalite father), also claims that his organisation is a trade union of all fishermen in the state.

Meanwhile, the Paruyuvila group with the backing of the church has gained entry into the advisory boards at state level and may strongly influence matters. Says Paruyuvila: "Kochery is a fraud. He has no backing of the Latin Catholic church. All the priests and nuns with him are Syrian Catholics while all the fishermen in Kerala are Latin Catholics."

The opposition parties in Kerala have jumped on to the Kochery bandwagon. When the Kerala Assembly reconvenes later this month two opposition MLA's have decided to fast on the floor of the House till Kochery's 17-point charter of demands is met. According to sources in the Fisheries Department, however, the Government cannot go against the interests of the mechanised boat owners as they are some of the biggest fund-raisers of the ruling coalition.

With the failure last fortnight in Trivandrum of conciliatory talks between Karunakaran and leaders of fishermen's unions, the situation seemed ready to deteriorate further. In Kottayam the Latin Catholic Bishop's Council has frowned upon the involvement of the clergy in the affair. As Karunakaran tries to solve the crisis his way, Kochery is planning a fast till death in front of the state secretariat if his federation's demands are not conceded immediately. Said Kochery: "This time it is a do or die effort. Unless the Government implements the Babu Paul report in toto we will fight till the bloody end." Strong words, and they point to more turbulence in Kerala's fishing industry.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

NEW DELHI

Blind Apathy

INDIA is no stranger to pressure groups clamouring for a larger share of the cake. Unlike some of them, however, the little band of people huddled under a shamiana in Delhi's scorching heat outside the Ministry of Social Welfare could not have failed to win the sympathy of passers-by. They were all blind and their demands could be summed up in one word: jobs. Said Bharat Prasad Yadav, president of the National Blind Youth Association (NYBA) which is coordinating the protest: "We are fed up. All we're asking is that the reservation of jobs in government for the blind be implemented honestly and that legislation be passed so that we are sure of getting our rights."



Blind protestors on dharna in Delhi

To get that point across to the Government, the NYBA has organised dharnas for the last three months, which have resulted in 575 arrests. This fortnight, the National Federation of the Blind is to sit in dharna before the prime minister's residence in support of their brother organisation's protest. Says S.K. Singh, secretary of the federation: "The Government never rejects our requests for jobs directly, but there is so much apathy that you feel totally frustrated."

The blind agitating in New Delhi last fortnight were the cream of the estimated 9 million "visually handicapped" in the country: they were all educated, the majority matriculates, and quite a few graduates and post-graduates. They felt it was time that the upper echelons of jobs in the Government, beginning with the officers' posts, called class A and B jobs, started going to them. "Only then can we be sure that other administrative positions will be offered to us elsewhere in the Government and in the private sector," says Ramesh Kumar Sarin, who earned a masters in political science some years ago and has been looking for a job ever since. "Every time I go to the special cell for the disabled in the employment exchange I am offered the job of a bottle-capper or an assembly man. Is this what I studied for?"

The basic plank of the agitators is that there should be statutory legislation for the blind at all levels. At the moment, there is 1 per cent reservation in class three and four posts in the Central Government and centrally administered public sector undertakings, but this is only by executive order and cannot be enforced in law. Gurcharan Pal, a music graduate from Delhi University who has been looking for a job since 1979, gives an example of what he calls crippling callousness: "In 1982, 66 posts of music teachers were advertised in central schools. Twenty-four blind applied; none were even called for the interview.

There's no doubt that finding jobs for the blind is a daunting task. The Delhi Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, one of 14 in the country which are supposed to bring the handicapped into the mainstream of employment, has placed only about 275 blind people in jobs in the 12 years of its existence, or about two a month.

Officials at the Social Welfare Ministry concede that the agitators have a point when they say that the jobs offered them do not fit their qualifications but are doubtful about whether their plea for legislation to secure their rights will be accepted. Says one: "There are already quite a few reservations on the list and nobody wants to add another. But the ministry is definitely going to do something to solve their grievances." He did not, however, say what that something would be and in the absence of any concrete offer the 'visually handicapped' are likely to continue their sit-in right through the summer.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

RAJASTHAN

Settling Scores



IT WAS a judgement for " which ruling party MLA's in Rajasthan were not prepared. Not only did they lose their official cars and other perks but also the clout which they wielded as chairmen of the more than 50 cooperative institutions in the state. By last fortnight 34 of the 37 Congress(I) MLA's and 175 other party workers had to quit chairmanships and memberships of various cooperative organisations like the Rajasthan State Cooperative Bank, State Consumers Cooperative Federation and Urban Improvement Trusts (UIT) following a cabinet decision directing all nominated heads to quit.

This politically important decision was taken by the Cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur soon after a high court ruling holding the nominations as illegal. Over a dozen individual members of cooperative banks in Sriganganagar, Sirohi, Jodhpur and Pali had challenged the appointments of chairmen in the high court. Said Mathur: "The state Government can't think in terms of politics always. We have to honour the judgement of the high court. The judiciary has to be given due respect." The chief minister promptly secured resignations from all the MLA's by last fortnight and replaced them with various government officials.

But according to his detractors, Mathur has used the high court judgement to settle scores with the dissidents. Emboldened by the Congress(I)'s victory in last month's assembly by-election, the chief minister first demanded resignations from all the MLA's who were chairmen or members of the various cooperative bodies. Since the majority of them were appointed during former chief minister Jagannath Pahadia's tenure, Mathur could not replace them before the expiry of their three-year terms. Pahadia, in order to retain his control over the Congress(I) Legislative Party created history when he appointed over 60 Congress(I) MLA's either as chairmen of the state public sector undertakings or the various cooperative bodies.

In 1981, a complaint was filed with the Election Commission asking it to unseat those MLA's who as chairmen were holding offices of profit. But the commission rejected the complaint and all of them continued to sit in their offices till last month's high court judgement.



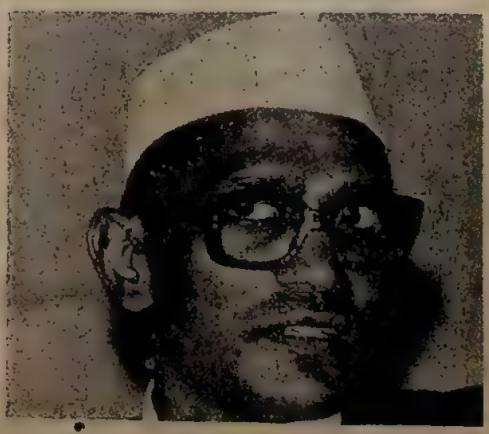
BHAWAN SINGH

Mathur: strengthened by the court ruling

Though there were serious allegations of corruption, maladministration and favouritism against all the cooperative bodies in the state, the state Government had refrained from taking any action because of the political implications. The majority of the chairmen and members were nominated primarily due to their ruling party connections. Pahadia even went to the extent of obliging Union Home Minister P.C. Sethi and the then high court chief justice, K.D. Sharma, by appointing their relations to the various cooperative bodies. In addition many others with controversial backgrounds were also accommodated. For example, a lecturer of Rajasthan University who was sacked for concealing the fact that he was caught using unfair means in his examination was appointed chairman of one of the dairy cooperatives of the state.

As a result the majority of the cooperative institutions were in the red. According to a state finance ministry official, the outstanding loans of all the state-based cooperative banks have increased 15 per cent since 1981. Similarly, none of the cooperative organisations have been able to show profits. The state vigilance department is looking into over 1,000 complaints of corruption against the various officials of these bodies. Alleges Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly: "The Congress(I) has no respect for the cooperative movement. By appointing politicians as chairmen, they have killed the movement. Instead of Pahadia's nominees, now there will be Mathur's own men." Mathur's actions did fuel that suspicion by allowing some of his own men to retain their posts.

Jagannath Pahadia: political sinecures



HARI OM GULATI

Nonetheless, the state Government issued an order last fortnight under which four of the seven chairmen of UIT were removed. Those who were asked to retire are believed to have either lost their importance in the new power set-up or are close to the dissidents. For example, the tenure of Hari Shankar Sharma, chairman of Alwar UIT and brother of former chief justice K.D. Sharma was not extended. Hari Shankar was nominated when his brother was the high court's chief justice. Moreover, Udaipur UIT's chairman Sheskra Pagario had to quit because he was a protégé of former state minister Hanuman Prashad Prabhakar whom Mathur had sacked recently.

In addition, Mathur was under pressure from his own party colleagues including cabinet ministers to review the Rajasthan State Cooperative Act. On May 27, he summoned an important meeting in Jaipur in which Minister of State for Cooperation Sri Ram Gotewala, additional Advocate-General, Prakash Mathur, and Cooperation Secretary B.K. Zutshi were present. Since the ousted MLA's were getting restive and wanted to regain their control over the cooperative institutions, a suggestion was mooted to amend Article 36 of the act to enable the state Government to appoint any person, except the officials as chairman.

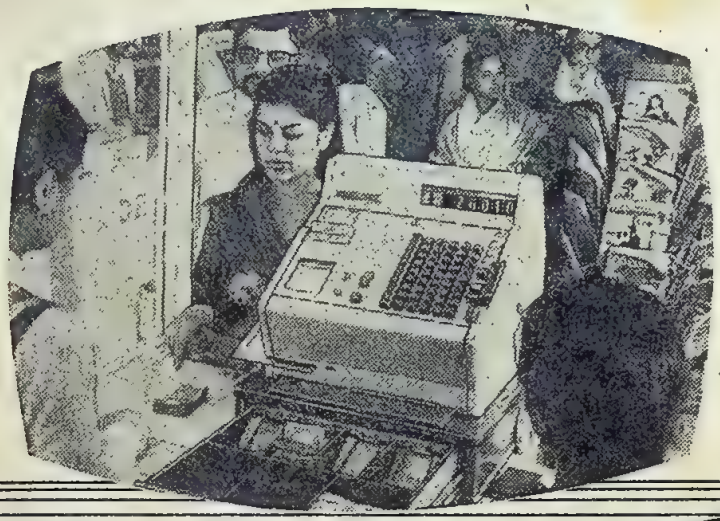
Mathur postponed any decision and flew to New Delhi for consultations. Along with him went over a dozen affected MLA's. During their meetings with the senior Central leaders, the MLA's agreed that the cooperative bodies should not be left at the mercy of the bureaucracy, which would not protect the ruling party's interest. However, Mathur succeeded in securing the high command's permission to deal with the situation at his own level.

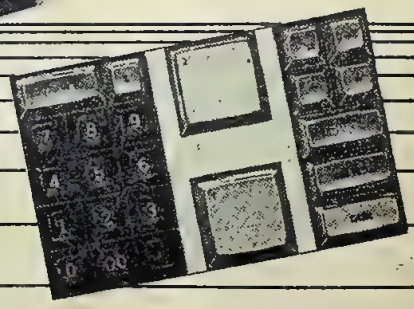
The court's ruling has strengthened Mathur. Just before the by-elections, the dissidents had revived their activities. Now, since only Mathur can provide the MLA's with sinecures, he will find more supporters than he had before.

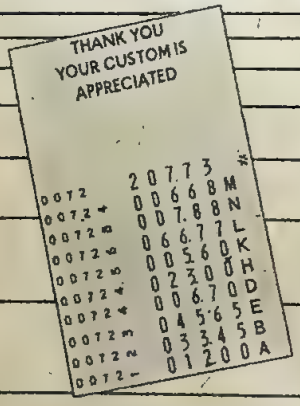
—PRABHU CHAWLA

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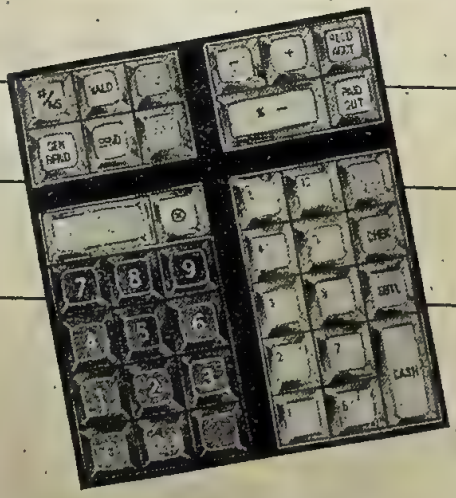
The tip of a pin launches a revolution







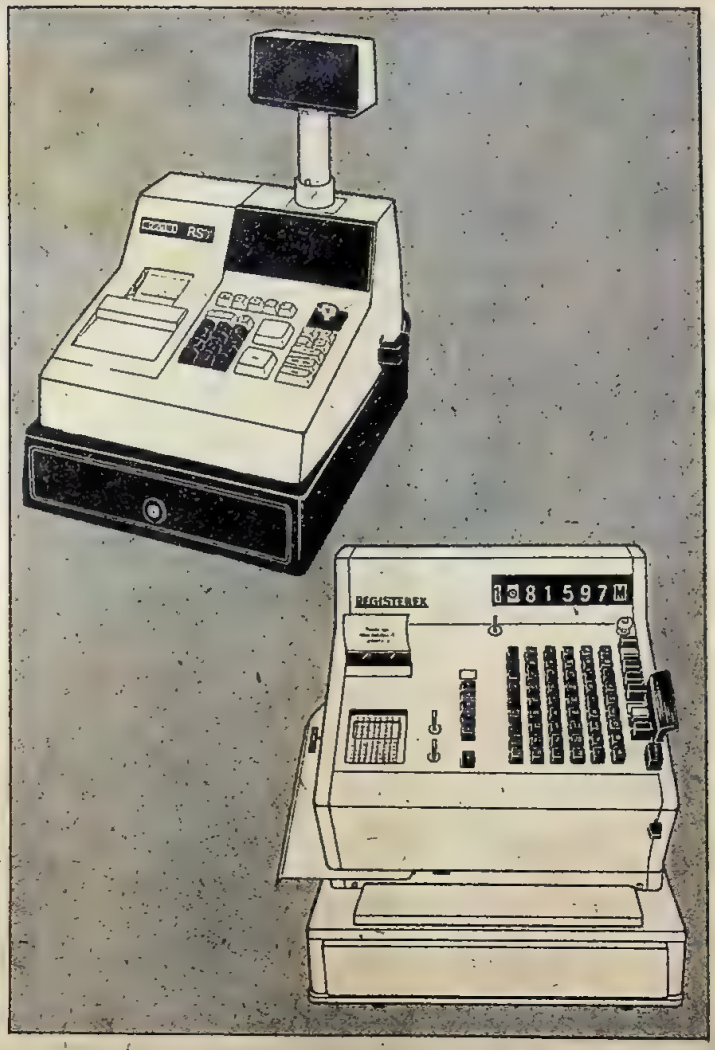






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Kelvinator



The first cash register in the world was invented by James Ritty, a saloon owner of Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A. The aim was to keep a track of all the cash transactions that took place in his establishment and eliminate pilferage. When a key was pressed, a price flag was displayed and a pin hole was pricked in a paper roll with separate columns for dollars and cents. Twelve holes in the cents column, for instance, meant 12 sales at that price.

Beginning with those pin-pricks, cash registers have come a long way, to attain a sophistication and versatility Ritty couldn't even have dreamt of. Revolutionizing the art of cash management the world over. In retail establishments, super markets, department stores, hotels, restaurants, snack bars, banks, post and telegraph offices, petrol stations, hospitals, etc.

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

The Great Divide



SPEAKING to a large group of industrialists invited up to Srinagar to promote new industry in Jammu & Kashmir, Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah did something extraordinary last fortnight. At the end of his long, emotionally-charged speech he simply broke down and wept. The captains of industry, congregated in one of the sparkling new conference rooms of the Rs 8 crore Sher- e-Kashmir Convention Centre on the shores of the Dal Lake, were as amazed at the chief minister's performance as he himself later admitted he was. "I've never broken down like that before," he disclosed. "I must have been quite disturbed and depressed."

Farooq Abdullah has reason to be both. His long speech, delivered in Hindi and English, centered mainly on the spreading agony of communal violence, both in Maharashtra and Punjab, which sooner or later would spill into his state. He spoke also of the mounting pressures, ideological and psychological, of repeated accusations of being "anti-national" or hand in glove with "secessionists" or "pro-Pakistani" elements. "We are breaking our nation into communities. Where is that secular India that we have been talking about for 37 years? Why are we not able to change our political culture? The coming election may break us up into smaller pieces. Why don't we accept that it is the corruptions of our political leaders that have led us to this situation and that we have failed to set any moral standards."

Farooq's woes, one year after he was unanimously voted into power and elected as his father's successor, have grown all round. Though his personal charisma, his popularity with the people and his political acumen remain undimmed, he has been beset by one crisis after another, wrought variously by the Congress(I), extremist political parties in the state, the Punjab situation and most of all by members of his own family.

Last month, when his elder sister Khalida led a procession through the streets of Srinagar



Farooq Abdullah: growing problems

(INDIA TODAY, June 15) to "expel" Farooq from the National Conference (NC) and become the "rightful" heir to her father's political legacy, the simmering family feud in the house of Abdullah finally boiled over. Revealing though Farooq's emotional outburst before the visiting industrialists was, it was made more depressing by the vicious little family drama enacted in the pretty cottages of Srinagar. Three members of his immediate family —elder sister Khalida, her husband G.M. Shah and younger brother Tariq— were now ganged up against him in conjunction with the Congress(I). It was an unexpected, if potentially dangerous twist in the year-long saga to destabilise his rule; or cause him considerable embarrassment at any rate. Acting swiftly, Farooq put down his sister's betrayal by showing his strength in a huge rally two days after she marched out, but the fact is that there now exist two National Conference parties —the NC(K) led by Khalida and the ruling NC(F) headed by Farooq. And the fall-out in the Abdullah clan, which could one day become a serious threatening factor, already looked like an imperial intrigue in some medieval court. "Khalida is nothing but a pawn in the hands of her husband," said Farooq, "and he only wants to be chief."

But as the aspiring chief's main ally, Khalida makes a reluctant politician. A handsome, quietly unassuming woman, she has by her own admission, never sought a public role. Content as a housewife raising her three children, she is still inclined to speak more fluently about her grandchild rather than discuss political matters. If she stands out in the sun too long she gets a headache. And sitting in the front room of her cottage that borders her mother's home behind the Nedou's Hotel, she is prompted in Kashmiri by her hawk-eyed husband for the right political phrases. Always politically dispassionate, coolly rational, rather simple minded and much loved in her family as the eldest child, Khalida's emergence as a political front for her ambitious husband is viewed by Farooq and his mother as the ultimate betrayal of the family.

Khalida agrees at the unpleasantness her breaking away has caused. "But it had to be done because of what he (Farooq) was doing to the party. It is a party my father built up as the sole cause in his life —it meant more to him than his family. And Farooq has surrounded himself with deceivers and sycophants who are bent upon ruining the party and its image."

Khalida's fight is actually her husband's fight. And his fight for a political resurrection started from the day it became clear that Farooq had been chosen by Sheikh Abdullah as his heir and political successor. On August 16, 1982, when Shah gave up his ministership he had been in the cabinet seven continuous years: first as minister for transport & food supplies, followed by a term handling power and public works department.

Now 64, he is making his definitive bid to come back, supported by a few cronies from old times like former finance minister D.D. Thakur who was

Shah (left), Khalida and Tariq Abdullah: driving a wedge



SHAKEEL BADYARI & CO.

ousted by Farooq. A hard-headed politician and a rigid Muslim, Shah is bent upon leaving no stone unturned to overthrow Farooq. His immediate task, he says, is to save the National Conference and, given his close link with the Congress, he is awaiting the right moment. "Farooq?" he asks, sitting comfortably in a white kurta-pyjama, a short, tough dynamo of intrigue, "you ask what I think of Farooq? Well, first of all he's a liar. Moreover, he's inexperienced and non-serious. He hasn't the capability of either controlling the bureaucracy or running a single department of the Government."

A further example of his successful effort at driving a wedge in the family is evident when he says: "I got two against those two," meaning that he has the support of two members of the Abdullah family—Khalida and her younger brother Tariq—against Farooq and his mother. As the chief orchestrator of the family divide, Shah tends to regard the acquisition of Farooq and Khalida's cantankerous younger brother Tariq as something of a strategic coup. Certainly the family fight is made more arch by Tariq's inclusion. For seven years managing director of the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC), Tariq too quit in 1982, eight days before his father's death. He has joined up with Khalida, become a member of the executive committee of the National Conference led by her, and is determined to fight Farooq till the bitter end.

Today Tariq says he spends his time "travelling" and "taking a rest" from the rigours of his seven-year-long official assignment. But it is clear that he spends the rest of it in mobilising his energies to fight his brother, politically and personally. Politically, he is in close contact with no Congress(I). "I am not working on behalf of the Congress(I)," he says, "though I may agree with them on certain issues."

Still, the threat of a serious destabilisation effort always exists. And if the Congress(I) were to make a concerted bid, the breakaway Abdullahs—Khalida and Tariq led by G.M. Shah—could become figures of considerable influence. This is unlikely to happen for so long as Farooq's mother lives and supports him. She remains a vital factor in manoeuvring the popular imagination as well as a shrewd and seasoned politician. Moreover, despite the Congress(I)'s best efforts the party continues to lack credibility in the valley.

But G.M. Shah is undeterred. He is convinced that if the Congress(I) sticks by his side, he could topple Farooq easily. Speaking of his plans for the dissident party which, so far, has one MLA, Sheikh Jabbar from Kangan near Ganderbal, he says: "We need only 13 MLA's to topple Farooq's Government with Congress(I) support. Maybe, we have only one MLA today. So if it takes some more time to get the rest, please don't mind." Kashmir's family fracas has all the makings of a political melodrama. —SUNIL SETHI in Srinagar

TERRORISM

Timely Arrest

SECURITY forces in the Kashmir valley heaved a sigh of relief last fortnight. With the arrest of Shabir Ahmed Shah they had nabbed the brain behind the string of bomb blasts that had terrorised the state since August last year. The 28-year-old Shah was found in a rented room in Srinagar in the company of a female student of Kashmir University. The police also recovered some empty bottles of whisky from the room.

The irony of the circumstances under which Shah was discovered was not lost on the police. It was the same Shah who had spearheaded the anti-liquor agitation in Anantnag with the looting of some shops. But obviously the lure of the forbidden stuff became too much for him and he succumbed. With the capture of Shah, DIG of police A.M. Watali claimed: "We have now succeeded in curbing such disturbing activities throughout the state."

Shah, a school drop-out, had been a militant activist since 1975 when he was one of the founders of the pro-Pakistan People's League (PL). His arrest paved the way for the capture of 19 more PL activists wanted in connection with the bomb blasts. "We sent threatening letters to some local newspapers and news agencies in the fictitious name of the Kashimr Liberation Front (KLF) and also the Kashmir Liberation Army, which does not exist," he told the police. The letters also carried a hit list of newsmen, police officers and some polticians, including new governor Jagmohan; the chief minister; and the state Congress(I) chief Mufti Mohammed Syed.



G.N. KHAYAL

Arms seized from the saboteurs

The blasts set off by Shah and his accomplices first began in August last year during the chief minister's speech in Srinagar's sports stadium on Independence day, when a bomb went off in the people's pavilion injuring four persons. Seven more blasts followed until April this year. Fortunately, there were no casualties. But security forces were worried because the terrorist activity seemed to be intensified after the February hanging of KLF activist Maqbool Butt in Delhi's Tihar Jail.

Among the arms recovered from the terrorists, one revolver carried Pakistani markings and army experts are looking into the origins of the others. But DIG Watali believes that Shah and his accomplices "are not political. They're simple cheats who wanted to benefit by looting liquor shops, drinking and womanising. Theirs was the ill-conceived adventurism of a frustrated lot who know they can't change the course of history by raising an anti-India bogey". All the 20 arrested have been held under the Public Safety Act, the Explosive Substances Act and under Section 307 of the Ranbir Penal Code, (attempt to murder).

The chain of explosions made headlines all over the country after the Congress(I) and some NC dissidents led by G.M. Shah tried to make political capital by alleging that Farooq Abdullah was shielding terrorists and encouraging their illegal activities.

But Dr Abdullah categorically refutes these charges. He told INDIA TODAY: "They have to sing this tune for their masters. I have made it clear that such anti-national elements who are desperately out to damage the character of our irrevocable accession with the Indian union will not be spared."

—GHULAM NABI KHAYAL

NEPAL

Winds of Change



AFTER two decades of relative political and social calm, the political elites of Nepal are getting blips of an ensuing storm, of political cloudbursts and a flood of social tensions. As the rains come after the summer of 1984, the signals seem to serve the purpose of confusing the elites rather than preparing them to meet the coming challenge of change.

Nepal's Panchayat democracy is distinctive from most other Third World political systems. Its most distinctive feature is the low profile of the military. The king is the supreme commander of Nepal's 25,000-man military force that consumes 10 per cent of the annual budget and is sustained on a puny provision of $20 million a year. Since the referendum of 1979 and with the three subsequent amendments to the Constitution, the Panchayat system has been informed with a significant participatory content. Elections from the village to the Rashtriya Panchayat are held directly on the basis of adult franchise. The prime minister is elected by the Rashtriya Panchayat with a minimum of 60 per cent of the members voting for him, and a year ago, the national assembly was able to vote a prime minister out of office. Although parties remain banned and the elections are partyless, campaigning generates heat and to some extent politicises the electorate from the village to the national level. Furthermore, the panchas of the national assembly are now divided into two main factions. The 'in' faction is regarded to be closer to the king than the 'out' faction. The latter faction is freely described as the "opposition".

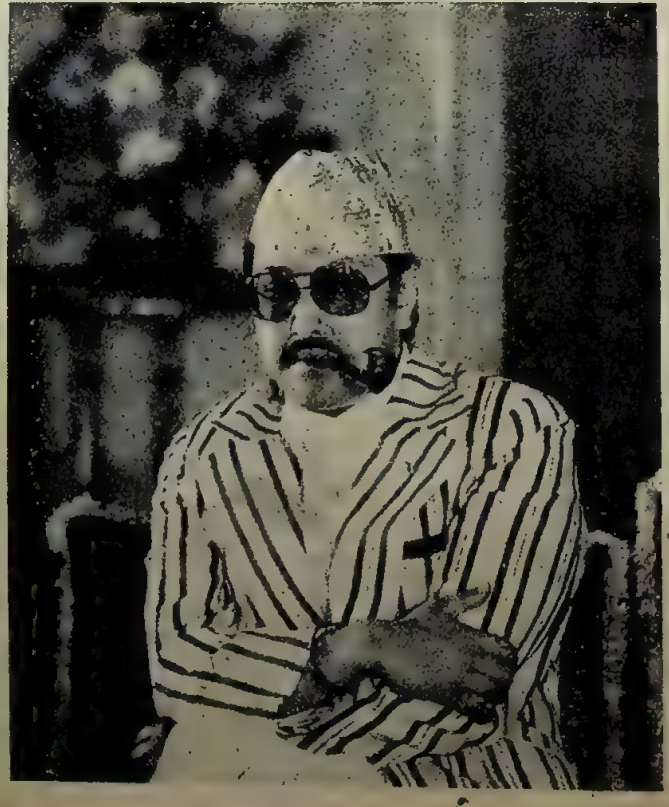
The signals in Nepal seem to serve the purpose of confusing the elites rather than preparing them to meet the coming challenge of change.

Still, Nepal is no democracy in the accepted sense of the political term. King Birendra rules and governs Nepal. He is the source of all power and the final decision maker. He has the right to veto legislation passed by the Rashtriya Panchayat. He has a royal "cabinet" that consists of the queen, the king's brothers and secretaries; and has his special advisors. The king nominates 28 members of the 104-member Rashtriya Panchayat; the palace—Narayana Hiti—supports its own candidates with funds and influence. As in the case of all ruling monarchs, the king of Nepal does not wish any prime minister to grow too strong and influential.

The fundamental rights included in the Constitution remain suspended. There is no formal press censorship. But the 104 newspapers and periodicals with less than 100,000 total circulation have to operate under strict written restrictions. No rallies or meetings can be held without previous official permission. Arbitrary arrests are not unknown. Dissident university and college teachers have been summarily dismissed. The judiciary is theoretically independent of the executive. But the Supreme Court is yet to order the release of a prisoner arrested in violation of the law.

In the current half-way house of Panchayat democracy, the focal point is the king. He is also the least known and the least predictable factor in Nepal's political life. In his 12-year rule, King Birendra, a product of St Paul's School in Darjeeling and universities in London, Tokyo and the USA, has projected himself in the role of a moderniser. His main emphasis has been on development. He has proved to be an affirmative monarch. In 1979, after large-scale student unrest and ominous signals of mass political protest, he decided to hold a referendum without even consulting the then prime minister. The people were given a chance to choose between party-based democracy and the partyless Panchayat system. The king and the supporters of the Panchayat system employed considerable resources to persuade the majority to vote for partyless Panchayat. They won. But a clear 45 per cent of the voters—2 million against 2.4 million—voted for party-based democracy. The Nepali Congress, leader of the party-based democratic movement, lost the election battle. It did not lose the political war.

King Birendra: affirmative power



This was recognised by the king himself. He gave a public assurance that the minority preferences would be taken into account. In quick succession, he ordered three amendments to the Constitution, increasing the representative content of the Panchayat system and in so doing, he intensified the contradictions in the system and accelerated the dynamics of change.

Leaders of the Panchayat system concede that Nepal cannot stand still nor can the representative process be reversed. The Prime Minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who was elected to the high office 11 months ago, said in an hour-long interview, "There is no going back. We must go forward." This conviction was echoed by two of his three most important cabinet colleagues, Pasupati Shamsher Rana, minister for water resources, and Prakash Chandra Lohani, finance minister. These two intel-

lectuals, together with the Home Minister, Padam Sundar Lawati, form the core of the country's present 21-member council of ministers.

Prime Minister Chand, who, at 45, has risen to the topmost office from his humble start as a village pancha, and who served previously as deputy speaker and speaker of the Rashtriya Panchayat, appears to be the mediator and conciliator of three groups within the ruling faction. He is a man known for his personal integrity, and his preference for consensus politics. The three groups within the ruling faction represent the "hardliners", the "liberals" and the "stayputters" respectively. The "hardliners" are said to favour a return to the partyless authoritarian Panchayat system existing in the '60s and '70s. The "liberals" would like to move forward step by step towards true democracy. The "stayputters" prefer to freeze the Panchayat system as it now stands and work for better, more honest, and more efficient government as well as for faster economic growth and development.

PRIME Minister Chand seems to subscribe to the view that faster economic growth, better distribution of the fruits of development, and economic and administrative reforms would strengthen the Panchayat system, blunt its contradictions, and gradually close the cleavage between its supporters and opponents. His Government has adopted a 7-point economic plan whose main thrust is to reduce Nepal's enormous economic disparities, increase production, start new industries, stamp out corruption and lower Nepal's current 60 per cent dependency on foreign aid. "We have no fundamental difference with the ousted prime minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa, and his faction," he said in his soft low voice, "our difference is about ways and means of achieving common ends."

Chand was less forthcoming on political issues. "The poor can influence government decisions," he asserted, but readily acknowledged that the Panchayat system had not done much for the poor. There is hardly a public distribution system outside Kathmandu; prices have been rising for the last three years at the rate of 12-13 per cent a year, and there are localised food shortages." It is incongruous to have a small enclave of the super rich amidst pervasive poverty, he admitted, and put forward his pet concept of a network of "industrial villages"—self-sufficient clusters of villages built around their own energy systems, appropriate industries, schools and dispensaries.

Eleven months are too short a period to judge the performance of a ministry, but, said Lokendra Chand, "our exports have picked up, prices have stabilised, we have cut down import of luxury goods and have been able to improve the balance of payment position somewhat."

Prakash Chandra Lohani, 47, a former professor at Tribhuvan University, was more forthcoming on political issues. In the 1979 referendum, he had voted for party-based democracy; he had even gone to prison for a short while for political activity disfavoured by the palace. Now a convert to the panchayat system, Lohani was aware that adult franchise would expand political awareness of the rural people, make them increasingly issue-oriented and create new pressures of economic and political demands on the system. At the same time, he believed that political parties were unsuited to Nepal's economic backwardness, its fragmented society, isolated hill areas, and weak political institutions.



Chand: mediator



Thapa: clear vision

Pasupati Shamsher Rana, Oxford-educated intellectual of the Panchayat system, claimed that there was a "generational change" between the present ministers and the older politicians like Tulsi Giri, Bista and Surya Bahadur Thapa. "They represent the perspectives of the '50s and '60s, while we are political children of the late '60s and '70s," said Rana who is a grandson of the last ruling Rana of Nepal and has married into the Scindia family of Gwalior. "We are an inward-looking generation," he added, "more concerned with Nepal's development than with external powers like India or China." Rana saw the Panchayat system as an evolutionary process. The political and social consciousness of the people was growing. During the Rana regime, only 200 families used to rule Nepal; now the political base of the Panchayat system was allowing mass political participation.

The man who has a clear vision of where the panchayat system should go from here and how is the prime minister who lost the confidence of the Rashtriya Panchayat 11 months ago because, it is said, he lost the confidence of the king. Surya Bahadur Thapa, 57-year-old chubby-faced star leader of the Panchayat system, has been prime minister of Nepal three times for a total period of eight years in the last two decades. He said he had allowed the no confidence motion against him to be passed, because he wanted the Rashtriya Panchayat to demonstrate that it had the power to dismiss a prime minister. He was now mobilising the panchas across the country as well as the people for further democratisation of the panchayat system.

Thapa has called for an assembly of panchas on June 13, for which he had not received permission till June 6. "Our task is to set the ball rolling; given a push, the ball will keep rolling on," said Thapa with a flourish of political confidence.

The great unknown of the scene is the mind of the monarch. King Birendra is believed to have kept channels of communication open to the leaders of the Nepali Congress. Some people, however, question whether he can act on his own initiatives. Several channels of political communication have opened up in Nepal—between a faction of panchas and the Nepali Congress, between the Nepali Congress and some communist groups and among the assorted leftist factions. The concept of a united front of all these elements is in the air. The Nepali Congress will be holding its second convention in two years, later this year to determine its course of action. Ganesh Man Singh, 74-year-old ranking leader of the banned Nepali Congress, saw no possibility at all of the democratic elements joining the partyless Panchayat system. "The king and the Nepali Congress should jointly build a strong, united, independent and developed Nepal," affirmed Singh, who had spent eight years in jail and had been twice severely beaten up during the Rana regime. He spoke of an "inevitable mass struggle throughout the country" if the king did not respond to the democratic urges of the people. The Nepali Congress lacks organisation but commands the loyalty of a large segment of Nepal's 40,000-strong university youth.

Few people in Nepal want a confrontation between the king and the democratic elements; most people hope that the king would intervene to defuse polarisation and take the panchayat process further on towards the goal of a democratic polity. But nobody is certain that this is what will happen.

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Flight of Fancy



THE MONTH of September will herald the anniversary of one of the most bizarre and gruesome chapters in world aviation history —the destruction of Korean Airlines (KAL) Flight 007 with 269 passengers on board over Soviet territory. And the question many people will still be asking is: was it a spy plane?

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy President Reagan denounced the Soviet Union as "barbaric" for having committed "a crime against humanity" in knowingly shooting down a passenger plane that had innocently strayed into Soviet territory. And Secretary of State George Shultz gave a lengthy briefing in which he buttressed the thesis that the Kremlin had committed an act of premeditated murder.

And after a mysterious initial silence, the Soviets announced that the KAL airliner—indistinguishable to Soviet fighter pilots as a passenger aircraft—had been on a spy mission over the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin Island, the Soviets' most sensitive military areas.

Even the most hidebound sceptics in the American press, and elsewhere, first swallowed the Reagan Administration's version hook, line, and sinker. Soviet spokesmen—the genies of the evil empire—were not to be believed. The official American point of view was bolstered by the subsequent fact-finding report of the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) which came to the conclusion that there was no concrete evidence that the KAL plane was on a spy mission.

The flight deviation of 400 miles into sensitive Soviet airspace, ICAO reported, could be attributed to pilot error. The report proposed several scenarios but settled on the supposition that a crew member had inserted the wrong longitude coordinate into the plane's navigation system. Failure to use other equipment and perform routine cross-checks could have allowed this initial error to result in a course similar to the fatal one flown by KAL 007.

But an analysis of the ICAO report performed by the Air Navigation Commission—ICAO's own technical arm—has taken issue with the original report and opened up a Pandora's box of doubts and contradictions. The technical commission concluded that ICAO's scenarios do not fit the known facts about the plane's course because they do not match with the plane's radar-verified positions near the beginning and end of its flight.

The Air Navigation Commission report, obtained by INDIA TODAY, states: "We found it difficult to endorse the conclusions connected with the scenarios postulated in the ICAO Secretary-General's Report because any one of them contained some points which could not be explained satisfactorily... The commission is unable to establish the exact cause for the significant deviation of KAL 007 from track."

The report has sparked off a new wave of investigative fervour aimed at determining what the governments of United States and South Korea knew about the flight and its real intentions. Among those doing the sleuthing are Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, the American Broadcasting Company, the Hearst newspaper chain, *Der Spiegel* magazine and the *Sunday Times* of London.

Several private individuals have also begun to dig beneath the rubble of official propaganda surrounding the KAL tragedy, among them, John Keppel, a former State Department official who has been unearthing and providing valuable information to reporters even as he prepares to write a monograph of his own on the subject. "It is my firm conviction," Keppel told INDIA TODAY, "that the intrusion was done on purpose, most probably to see what the reaction would be. The number of things that the pilot and co-pilot would have had to do wrong —if the flight was an innocent deviation—is just beyond belief. I'm not saying we have a smoking gun, and whether the flight was a Korean or American intelligence operation is still up in the air."



Keppel is not alone in this conviction. Two highly regarded German experts—former Lufthansa security chief Rudolf Baumberg, as well as German Air Transport Association chief Wolfgang Heim—are reportedly willing to testify that the KAL incursion was deliberate and probably connected with intelligence gathering.

The Thomases who now doubt the American version of events do so for several reasons, among them:

► The airliner was equipped with the most sophisticated navigation system computers. The failure of one causes another backup computer to take over automatic guidance of the aircraft. This is the same system that guided Apollo astronauts to the moon. According to standard pre-take-off procedures the crew programmes the computers to run through the entire flight theoretically. If some of the figures fed into the computer by the crew are wrong the computer will show the aircraft ending up at the wrong place.

► The Jumbo Jet was also equipped with two good Bendix radars as additional navigational systems that can map ground terrain and spot 'bombs' such as the rugged Kamchatka coastline and the easily recognisable Sakhalin Islands. In addition, radar beacons, and sea beacons along the plane's flight path should have activated other navigational systems that depend on ground signals to give the airliner an even more precise fix on its position. "The pilot and co-pilot and navigator would either have to be asleep or drunk for them to have strayed so far," one expert reserved. But the brief conversations which were recorded by the Japanese Air Traffic Control

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showed the pilot's voice as being normal.

▶ Shortly after Reagan and Shultz accused the Russians of a "massacre", US intelligence experts conceded during private briefings that the Soviets did not know they were downing a commercial plane. This report, sent to the White House, contained information that the Russians thought they were tracking an American RC-135 reconnaissance plane rather than a 747 and that the decision to shoot it down was made on that basis.

▶ At that point Shultz stated that American intelligence were not aware of the incident until it happened. But then he contradicted himself by revealing a blow-by-blow account of the chronology of the incident. This strongly indicated that the US —through radar interceptors and other communications devices—was aware of the plane's deviation into Soviet territory and yet did nothing to warn the plane. Based on this information, Betty Lim, widow of one of the passengers, filed a billion-dollar lawsuit against the US claiming that the plane entered Soviet airspace at the direction of the South Korean "and/or American government" to engage in surveillance.

▶ Shultz's statement about the US tracking the flight was repeated by Charles Lichtenstein, acting representative of the US to the United Nations who was reacting to a statement from the Soviet representative that the US had followed the flight "in a most attentive manner". Lichtenstein responded in a burst of sarcasm: "Now, I would assure the representative of the Soviet Union that we followed you following the KAL flight."

▶ According to Keppel both these statements indicate that the US was aware of the deviation of the flight into Soviet territory from the moment it occurred. The US radar station at Shemya, at the western end of the Aleutian Chian is capable of monitoring the communications of Soviet radar installations along the Soviet coast with their base stations. Writing in the prestigious American *Armed Forces Journal*, Yitzak Tarasulo, a Soviet defector with radar experience in Siberia, said that the KAL 007 flight must have been within range of some 50 to 60 Soviet radars. "So in effect we have the word from the secretary of state that the US was able to follow the data acquired by the Soviet radar along the track KAL followed even before it entered Soviet airspace—in plenty of time for the US to have examined the matter and still to have talked to Moscow to head off the tragedy," Keppel says. "Why was this not done?"

▶ Two former crew members of an RC-135 reconnaissance plane—Edward Eskelson and Tom Bernard—have said publicly that these planes observe the Sakhalin Island-Kamchatka Peninsula area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and report technical intelligence to the highest level of the US Government. And they maintain that the KAL flight "was meticulously monitored and analysed by US intelligence".

▶ An Associated Press (AP) despatch carried by the London *Times* on September 2 quoted a Pentagon officer as saying: "Nothing flies over or near Sakhalin that we don't monitor." AP reported that the surveillance work "routinely included eavesdropping by US and Japanese intelligence on Soviet military radio transmissions, ground-to-air and air-to-air conversations".



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▶ Ernest Volkman, national security editor for defence *Defence Science Magazine* told the Canadian Broadcasting Company that Korean Airline planes regularly overfly Soviet space to gather military intelligence. Other countries, including the Soviets and Cuba, he said, also regularly use civilian planes for gathering intelligence information.

▶ Quoting a senior "defence source" the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that some foreign government-owned civilian planes are fitted with cameras and sensoring devices at a handful of US bases. Private electronics firms perform the work with US approval.

Shultz claimed there was no evidence to show that the Russians had attempted to warn the plane before downing it. But after the plane's fuselage was recovered with bullet holes in it a transcript of the Russian pilots' conversations with ground control was revised to include a reference to "cannon bursts" or warning shots.

So far, the United States Congress as well as most of the American press has recoiled from opening an investigation of a subject as controversial and as sensitive as this. Many Americans believed that after the Bay of Pigs, the secret bombing of Cambodia, and Watergate, the country would be weakened by another scandal, and that the KAL case, no matter where it leads, is best left alone.

Keppel disagrees with this negative attitude of the administration. "To hold this view," he says, "would be to give up on the effort to maintain responsible government. It would mean that any arbitrary act of sufficient gravity undertaken in secrecy would automatically place itself beyond the processes of a constitutional government ultimately responsible to its own citizens. And in view of what is happening in the arms race, the maintenance of prudent, responsible government is becoming not less but more important."

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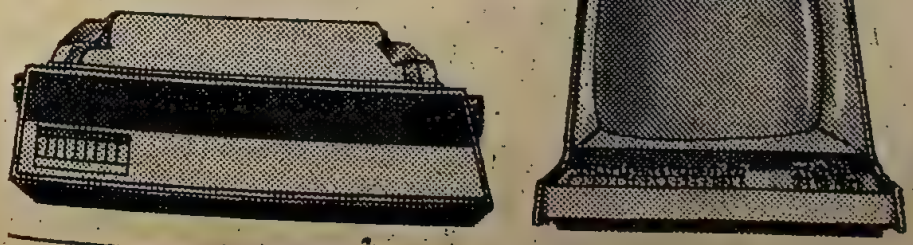
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FRANCE

Preparing for the Pageant

IT IS slated to be the biggest show of its kind in France, a veritable sunburst of Indian inventive spirit and creative energy that is expected to rectify the blinkered vision of all those Gauls hitherto afflicted with cultural myopia when it comes to India. Officials—both Indian and French—hope the year-long extravaganza will help alter the deeply etched Louis Malle images of damning squalor and deprivation on the one hand and profligate maharajas and rapacious tigers on the other. The Festival of India—titled here L'Année de L'Inde (India Year) 1985-86 and scheduled to be inaugurated in June 1985—has generated boundless optimism and scholarly interest among France's elite. This is exceptional for a city that routinely hosts probably the largest number of richly varied exhibitions, ballets, operas, avant-garde plays, film festivals and classical and rock concerts of any world capital.

As far as Indian officials are concerned, this *ardeur* is gratifying, and is backed up by a heavyweight 33-member French committee whose job is to oversee and organise the festival. Besides cabinet big wheels like Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson and the irrepressible Minister for Culture Jack Lang, the committee also comprises almost all the distinguished curators and directors of France's prestigious museums and cultural centres. Others involved are Jean Riboud, chairman of the giant Schlumberger group, who is considered to be one of President Mitterrand's closest friends, industrialist Patrice Pelat, Rene Thomas director-general of Banque Nationale de Paris, Pierre Giraudet president of Air France, Andre Fontaine editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, designers Pierre Cardin and Jean Louis Dumas of the Hermes group and Michel Combal, head of the Asia-Oceanic division at the French Foreign office. The 36-member Indian committee is led by the doyenne of Indian culture Pupul Jayakar. Besides Narendra Singh, Indian ambassador to France, this group includes Mohammad Yunus, Natwar Singh, Dr Narayana Menon, S.K. Misra, Professor Yash Pal, Girish Karnad, Akbar Padamsee, Manmohan Singh, Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, architects Charles Correa and Raj Rewal, industrialists Aditya Birla and Sanjay Dalmia, Wajahat Habibullah, the Prime Minister's Secretariat director, and secretaries of ministers like tourism, information & broadcasting, commerce, science & technology, education and civil aviation.

The Année de L'Inde is expected to be jointly inaugurated in mid-June 1985 by President Mitterrand and the Indian prime minister, with an Indian mela—enlivened by Indian street performers, magicians, musicians, puppeteers, dancers and food stalls (dhabas). The festival will begin at a time when economic and political ties between the two countries are steadily escalating. However, the sweeping and seductive image that economic ties between the two countries are "booming" is false. This is partly due to what one French official describes as "sexy items on the agenda" that attract widespread media attention; such as the sale of Mirage-2000 and various military paraphernalia, nuclear fuel, ultra-chic digital telephones, giant aluminium plants and oil. In reality, as an industrial partner, France remains well behind the US, UK, West Germany, Japan, and Switzerland. But now with the enhanced level of contacts between Paris and New Delhi, this situation may be gradually changing.



(Clockwise from top left) Pupul Jayakar, Narendra Singh, Michel Guy and Cherif Khaznadar: ambitious plans

Yet, despite the burgeoning ties, a palpable information gap and ignorance about India continue to persist. France's preoccupation with Africa endures; given its historic links with that continent. Scholars on China and Japan abound, but the Indologist is still a rarity. In the French media, interpretation of Indian events often comes in a bizarre mix. The rare special supplement on the Indian economy—usually a slapdash affair, essentially designed to generate advertising revenue—is interspersed with the outlandish idiosyncratic profiles of a Phoolan Devi or an Amitabh Bachchan. What does receive regular coverage is the mayhem in Punjab or carnage in Assam, intrigues in Kashmir or fostering of the Tamil guerrilla movement in southern India. "Consider the resultant mix," says a retired French diplomat, "you have all this bloodletting along with all those freak, weird stories. Is it any wonder an average Frenchman doesn't have a clue about India. That it possesses a dynamic industry, some of the most brilliant scientists you can find anywhere, a superbly performing agricultural sector, rapidly expanding space programmes—and all this achieved in under 40 years."

Although the actual selection of programmes and performing artistes will be made only in the forthcoming months, the broad outlines of the festival have been worked out. The organisational responsibility of the festival is broadly divided between the cultural wing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—the Association Francaise d'Action Artistique (AFAA) and the Ministry of Culture. The city of Paris whose mayor is the country's foremost opposition leader, Jacques Chirac, is also chipping in with some help.

The financial arrangements for the festival is that transport and cargo will be borne by India and all other expenses by the French. The highlight of the entire festival is expected to be the Peter Brook spectacular—the staging of the epic Mahabharata with an international cast. It is to be in two versions—French followed by English (*see interview*).

The Maison du Culture du Monde is being given the responsibility for presenting traditional and contemporary Indian arts. Cherif Khaznadar, the director, said: "For the India Festival, we intend to have six broad divisions. Percussions of India; street arts like the Indian circus; contemporary Indian theatre; puppeteers; Chhau dances and martial arts—rare forms which are unknown here. We want to bring both the best of the known and the unknown. Our only criterion is to ensure that what we are presenting is genuine and authentic."

While Khaznadar and his group will concentrate on focussing on the "rich di-

PETER BROOK

The Master's Masterpiece

AT 59, British theatre supremo Peter Brook is a far cry from the young director who drew such startled attention with his scandalous opera Salome *years ago at the Covent Garden. Today, his charming studio near the historic Place de la Bastille shows his relatively new-found interest in mystical Indian literature—volumes of the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata lie thick on his study table. By a remarkable coincidence, his 10-year-old project on the Indian epic, by his own admission one of the "most formidable" he has undertaken, is nearing completion in time for the Festival of India to be held in France next year and in the US the year after that. Paris Correspondent* RAMESH CHANDRAN *met the internationally renowned director recently. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *How did you discover the Mahabharata?*

A. This happened long ago. My friend and collaborator Jean-Claude Carriere and I first encountered the Mahabharata the way an Indian child does—which was by somebody retelling the story orally over months. I started asking Phillipe Lavastine—a respected French Sanskrit scholar who has spent much of his life studying in India—questions about the Bhagavad Gita. And for us, it didn't start at the beginning. He started by saying that 'to understand why Krishna is there with Arjuna at the beginning of the battle, I should tell you just what precedes the battle'. Out of this, gradually, gradually, for months, grew backwards and forwards the whole story of the Mahabharata. It took a long, long time.

Q. *In what way have you approached the epic?*

A. Mahabharata is such an enormous project and we've been working at it for close to 10 years. Everything I'm now trying to do about it is the same line I've followed all my life. For instance, in relation to Shakespeare, I've always been violently opposed to any academic approach in which you try to find out how it was done in Elizabethan times, what was the historical background, what is the correct tradition. If we do a western transposition of the Mahabharata that is not deeply respectful of the work, then it is simply not worth doing. At the same time, I cannot say we have to impregnate all the Mahabharata traditions, since each region in India has a Mahabharata tradition—but to try to assimilate and then in all freedom retell it in such a fashion that can bring it close to a western audience. One can be so careful about doing something correctly and respectfully that there is the danger that it can become a monument which is very boring.



Brook: labour of love

Q. *Is it a coincidence that your play should be ready in time for the Festival of India?*

A. It is an extraordinary coincidence. As the story unfolded, Jean-Claude Carriere and I looked at each other and said this was not only the greatest but also one of the most relevant dramatic materials of today. And the material was fabulous—that in itself isn't enough since there are fabulous stories in every tradition, in Russian, Chinese, Japanese. But what is so unique about the Mahabharata is the link between a sense of wonder and amazement and a human reality so precise which makes it instantly recognisable to us. Although our planning began almost 10 years back, it has come along at the right time. If it had not existed now, the festival would have had to invent it.

Q. *What kind of a format do you intend to stage the Mahabharata in?*

A. We will have three plays each lasting two to two-and-a-half hours. In the second season, we will play it as a trilogy during which people will be able to see it either on consecutive nights or within one day. What we are presenting is a microcosm and the central armature is of course the Pandava story. You cannot plan to project the entire story in nine hours—you'll hardly get through the first scene. Mind you, not that they don't adapt in India—I once saw the whole Mahabharata staged in Madras in 40 minutes!

Q. *Are Indians involved in the play?*

A. Indians are involved at all levels. We plan to present two versions—French and English. As far as casting is concerned, it is difficult to find a good Indian actor who speaks perfect French. But we have numerous Indian collaborators and advisers. L. Subramaniam and Komal Kothari are assisting with the music. We have a distinguished panel of advisers with Pupul Jayakar, Dr Narayana Menon, Kapila Vatsyayan, to mention a few. We also have a number of other Indians, not so well-known perhaps, assisting us at every stage.

Q. *What would you say about the impact of the Festivals of India abroad?*

A. I see this as a very small investment. In England there had always been a fixed image of India—out of date and traditionally based on a handful of upper class Indians who came to Oxford, and Cambridge—and also the generalised clichés about the streets of Calcutta. In recent years, the English image of India has been totally revitalised. India is now seen as something richer, more complex, infinitely more interesting. I have found it deplorable that the basic colonialism that has been going on in the last century in culture was the fact the colonialists exported their culture—that in every part of the world, Shakespeare and Moliere were thrown at the heads of people who didn't want to hear them, and there was no two-way traffic. The only culture that came back from the colonised countries was the culture you could actually steal and put in your museums. So while you can see great Indian objects in British and French museums, it is only recently that the existence of Indian music, dance or theatre has come to be recognised—and the existence of a masterpiece comparable with Homer and Shakespeare, like the Mahabharata.

versity of Indian culture", traditional Indian music and dance will come under the ambit of Michel Guy's celebrated Autumn Festival. Started in 1972, the Festival d'Autumne has today become one of the most eagerly awaited events in Paris. One of its most brilliant successes was Inde du Sud a season devoted entirely to south India. A part of the Autumn Festival will be an exposition on Indian architecture, where one segment is to be reserved exclusively to Le Corbusier.

The third main section—and what many here consider to be the "pivotal aspect" to the whole festival—is a massive panorama on classical Indian art. The difficult task of choosing the show lies with oriental scholar Vadime Elisseeff, who is also the chief conservator of the Musee Guimet and Dr B.N. Goswami from the department of fine arts, University of Punjab. Elisseeff says he would like the paintings, the sculptures, the miniatures and other *objets d'arts* to reflect different schools and epochs. He adds: "Sure, many of our visitors may not be familiar with Indian history. But I dislike the practice of footnoting the entire history under an object. Its principal function is to appeal to the senses. Now if you want to learn history, you could go to a library. You don't attend an art exhibition to learn history."

A small selection of 5 or 6 contemporary Indian painters to be chosen by Dominque Bozo of the Pompidou Centre has also been planned. The centre will also hold a panorama of Indian cinema presenting some of the films shown during the resoundingly successful Indian film festival last year and some new ones.

A separate segment titled 'The Eastern Drum' (after Pupul Jayakar's book) representing rural arts and crafts is to be mounted under the direction of Rajeev Sethi, at the Pavilion des Arts. Other highlights include a textile exhibition representing the country's fabulous textile tradition to be held at the Museum of Decorative Arts.

While this anticipated Indian cultural effloresence in France is being warmly received by the French, a few also counsel prudence and raise questions about its ultimate objectives. Georges Fischer, a member of the French committee who has for long advocated exchange of scholars and historians between the two countries, points out that there has to be some tenacious, hardnosed follow-up programmes after the festival if the present "information gap" is to be effectively bridged, something which no amount of singing and dancing can countervail. Deliberating on a similar vein, Daljit Aurora, chairman of the Handlooms & Handicrafts Export Corporation, argued that the long-term goals of a festival of such remarkable radiance should not be obfuscated or muffled—it ought to reap some commercial benefits and reinforce the image of India abroad.

Meanwhile, vigorous preparations for the festival are already underway. The brisk French organisers are leaving no stones unturned. As Pupul Jayakar pointed out: "France is unique since it has the largest cultural budget in the entire western world." In India too the organisers have swung into action. Commenting on the festival, an organiser said: "Our job is to put up a splendid show. We don't expect the average Frenchman exposed to a 'year of India' to expound on Chola architecture or discuss the nuances of the Bhairavi. If their overall perception and conception of India has been updated by even 10 per cent, then I'd say all this effort would have been worthwhile."

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Paris

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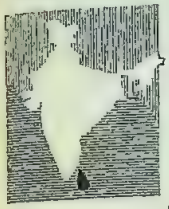
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SRI LANKA

The Israel Imbroglio



INDIA and now, almost unbelievably, Israel are dominating the highly charged and increasingly confused political debate in Sri Lanka. The preoccupation with India is all too understandable since the "Indian dimension" in the island's unresolved ethnic issue is both visible and inescapable.

Israel, on the other hand, thrust itself into the debate with the announcement that an "Israeli interests section" will be opened in the US Embassy. The Israelis, said Foreign Minister Hameed, would provide certain "specialised consultancy services" which everybody understood to mean the training of commando-type units in counter-guerrilla operations in the Tamil northern province. But the PLO ambassador in Colombo told the press that Mossad agents, were also in the country to beef up the local intelligence services. Opposition MP's have also made the same claim.

While the Indian and Israeli issues are vastly different in origin and character, their impact on political opinion is surprisingly similar. Though traditionally, an anti-Indian cry could unify at least temporarily, majority Sinhala-Buddhist sentiment, the present controversy over how to deal with Delhi and Madras seems to have produced fissures in the ruling United National Party (UNP) hierarchy.

The debate over Israel has also created ripples. It has not only pitted the entire opposition Sinhala and Tamil, right, left and centre, against the Government, but resulted in splitting an ideologically homogeneous Muslim community that has been the UNP's most loyal supporters. Divisive tendencies in the island's second biggest minority (one million in number and 7 per cent of the total population) community can hardly be the most encouraging news to a government desperately trying to win back a deeply alienated Tamil minority while at the same time its armed forces are engaged in battle with Tamil militants.

The electoral behaviour of the business-minded Muslim community does reveal a basic conservatism. But a newly emergent intelligentsia, influenced by radical ideas as diverse as Gaddafi's *Green Book* and Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary fundamentalism have begun to undermine the hegemony of the community's leaders.

At a recent meeting of Sri Lanka's assorted Muslim organisations, the Government was asked to revoke the decision regarding the Israeli cell which "hurt



The debate over Israel has not only pitted the entire Opposition, Sinhala and Tamil, against the Government, but resulted in splitting an ideologically homogenous Muslim community.

Muslim religious susceptibilities" and would alienate Arab and Islamic countries. Senior members like Sir Razeek Fareed, Dr M.C.M. Kaleel and Dr Baduidin Mahmud were sidelined as the younger Muslims assailed the Government. Kaleel is the president of the All-Ceylon Muslim League and also treasurer of the UNP and a former cabinet minister. Mahmud was education minister in Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government. Religious loyalties were thus crossing party lines.

The population inasmuch as a third of the eastern province is Muslim. Geographically and culturally closer to the rebellious northern province, the racially mixed eastern province has also had its share of political violence and security measures. The Muslims in other parts of Sri Lanka, however, are far more "assimilated" and move closely with the Sinhalese. In spite of which in the past there have been minor Sinhalese, Muslim clashes.

The Government may take comfort in the hope that this local protest will rapidly subside. A much greater cause for anxiety would be an Arab backlash. The Jordanian foreign minister had requested his Sri Lankan counterpart to reconsider the decision about Israel "bearing in mind the extent of Sri Lanka's interests in the Arab world".

The island's economic relations with the Arab states have been both diversified and deepened after 1970 when Bandaranaike suspended relations with Israel. Sensing the patent advantages, the UNP pursued the same policy and raised the PLO office to embassy status.

In 1981, a peak year, Sri Lanka had more than 200,000 migrant workers in the Middle East. Last year they remitted over 6 billion Sri Lankan rupees, second only to tea as exchange earner. Three new Arab Banks in Colombo indicates the widening business contacts between the island and its major oil supplier, a big tea importer and a new aid-giver. Describing the Israeli move as "astonishing" the *Saudi Gazette* has warned Sri Lanka of its dangerous implications.

A congenitally combative Prime Minister Premadasa has kept out of the Israeli debate, concentrating his fire on India and Mrs Gandhi. According to him Bandaranaike can boast about crushing the 1971 Sinhalese youth insurgency only because those rebels had no "bases" outside the country. Tamil "terrorism", he, argues, will cease if only India sends back "murderers, bank robbers and kidnappers" and stops giving them sanctuary and support. Sharing this view, most ministers blame Tamil Nadu, but Premadasa says that none of this can be done without Delhi's complicity.

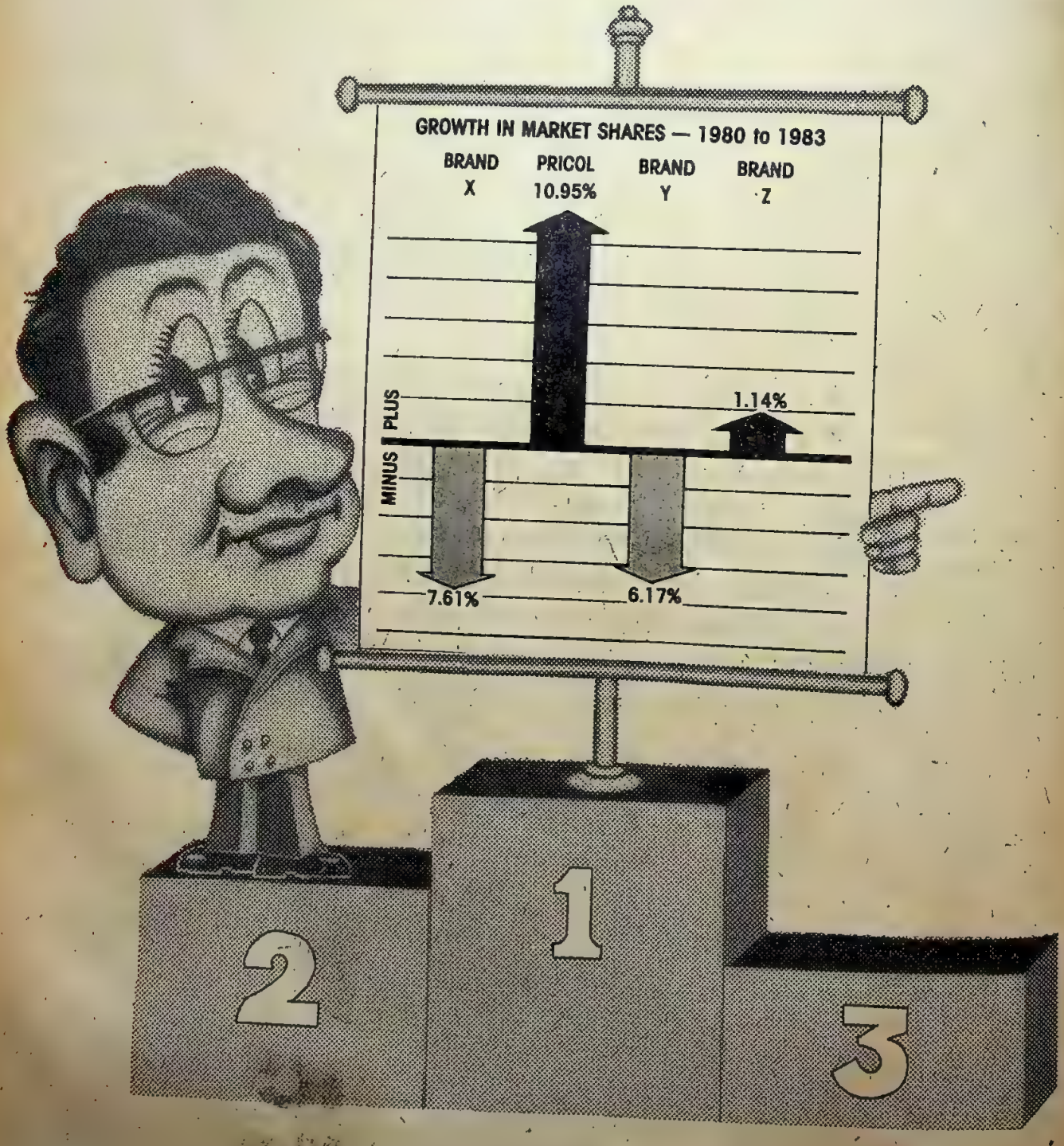
Premadasa's remarks, addressed directly to Mrs Gandhi, brought an instant reaction from leading politicians and the Indian External Affairs Ministry which complained about the "intemperate" language. When the Opposition leader Anura Bandaranaike involved Premadasa in a furious verbal exchange, Industry Minister Cyril Mathew shouted, "You (the Sri Lanka Freedom Party) are stooges of India." At a rally later, Premadasa referred to Mrs Gandhi as Anura Bandaranaike's "aunty".

The day after the debate, Athulathmudali advised all politicians not to offend India "by word, deed or conduct". But it was left to cabinet spokesman Ananda Tissa De Alwis, to do his best to paper over the glaring contradictions in cabinet thinking. "These are shades of opinion" he told a none-too-convinced press.

—MERVYN DE SILVA

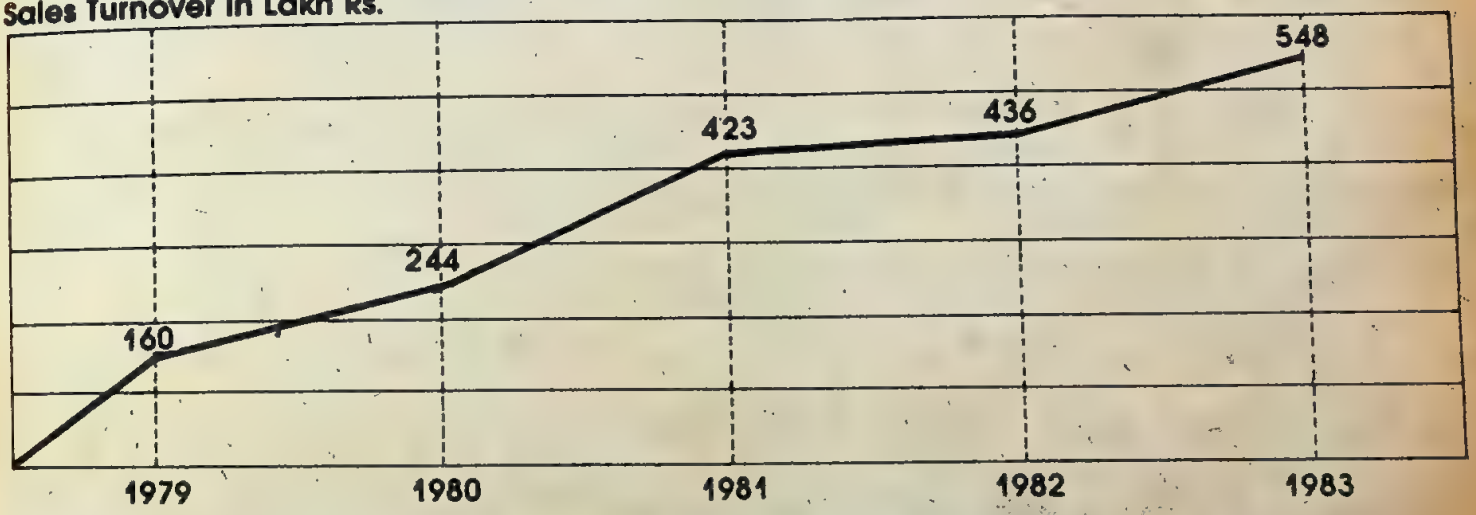
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CHAIN REACTION

AN INTERNATIONAL fast foods chain will soon enter India for the first time, in collaboration with a non-resident Indian. Avtar Singh Selhi, a London-based businessman, plans in collaboration with Wimpy International of the UK to open 250 outlets in major Indian cities. Wimpy Foods will make a beginning in Delhi with 20 parlours before branching out into other metropolises. Selhi and his wife will hold Rs 40 lakh worth of equity shares in the Rs 1.46 crore project. The remaining Rs 10 lakh equity share capital, informed sources say, will be contributed by a top-level civil servant in the External Affairs Ministry. The company expects an after-tax profit of Rs 20.85 lakh on a turnover of Rs 3.51 crore in 1984-85, these figures rising to Rs 1.53 crore and Rs 14.44 crore, respectively, in 1988-89. Also planned is the processing and marketing of frozen foods in India and their export to West Asia, Europe and the United States. Wimpy International, a subsidiary of United Biscuits plc, owns 23 restaurants throughout the UK in addition to a further 350 franchised outlets. It will provide the technical know-how to and train Wimpy India's staff free of cost. However, Selhi's Thomas Trading Company has to buy the machinery from the same company that Wimpy International buys its machinery to ensure the maintenance of quality.

CRASH PROGRAMMES

ONE OF the two companies fighting a take-over bid by the London-based Swraj Paul, DCM, seems to have run into bad luck in its quest for new projects. A series of diversification programmes planned have failed to get the required official clearances. One proposal, to manufacture a raw material required for detergent production, is likely to be given the go-by, with the Government favouring a rival proposal put to it by the Bombay-based Reliance Textile Industries. A second proposal to manufacture toilet soap has been stymied by the Government's insistence that the plant be located in a backward Uttar Pradesh district, whereas the company feels that the logical location is Delhi. A third proposal, to manufacture polyester film, has made no headway, while DCM's affiliate company Shri Ram Fibres has failed to get government clearance for a collaboration with du Pont to manufacture teflon. About the only project to get official clearance is one for a gas-based fertiliser plant, but this is now held up by differences within the company's senior management on the financial viability of the project.

OPTING OUT

REPORTS have been doing the rounds in business circles about a coming shake-up in the top managements of some companies belonging to the J.K. group. Lalit Singhania, who runs J.K. Cotton Mills in Kanpur, is considering the possibility of moving out. Simultaneously, his brother Sitaram Singhania, who has made J.K. Synthetics into the group's star performer, is also rumoured to be thinking of moving out. Sitaram Singhania denies any such move, but a change of mind in the next few months is not entirely ruled out. A third brother, Deepak Singhania, runs the Lohia Machines scooter plant in Kanpur. The three Singhania brothers are only distantly related to the main branch of the Singhania family, and Lohia Machines has been promoted by them and their maternal cousin, R.K. Lohia. Also, one of Lohia Machines' subsidiary companies, Acme Investments, produces goods that compete with J.K. Synthetics in the market. However, reports of friction developing over this and other factors are strongly denied.

DOWNWARD TREND

THE DEBENTURE boom seems to be over, judging by the figures of debenture issues compiled by the *Economic Times* for 1983-84. These show a sharp drop in debentures from Rs 197.4 crore in 1982-83 to Rs 27.9 crore, a fall of over 85 per cent. The number of debenture issues declined simultaneously from 21 to six. Earlier this year, there was only one debenture issue, by Ceat Tyre. As a result of this, the total capital raised from the capital market through issues of equity and preference shares, rights issues and debentures fell from Rs 369.3 crore in 1982-83 to no more than Rs 252.9 crore a year later. This was despite the total number of capital issues going up from 233 to 272.

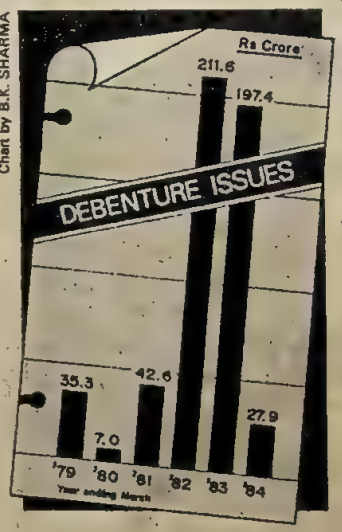


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

DESIGN DUEL

THE MAKERS of Afghan Snow, E.S. Patanwala have sued Lakme, the Tatas' cosmetics company, for allegedly copying the design of their new plastic container. Patanwala had commissioned Metal Box's subsidiary Cosmex for the job. The new packaging, launched in September last year, helped increase the company's share of the 1,100 tonnes medicated vanishing cream market from 15 per cent to 35 per cent by April-end. By then, however, Lakme had persuaded Cosmex to design a similar pack for its own product. The thin-walled tapered pack differs from the Afghan Snow design in that the lid has hexagonal edges, but the colour scheme, stacking arrangement, tapered edges and other features are identical with that of Patanwala's. The court case now seeks to restrain Lakme from infringing Patanwala's registered design. But Lakme and Cosmex have still to file replies to the court's notice.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

The Secrets of Success



WHAT is the secret of successful business management? Why does one corporation do extraordinarily well, while another similar company falls by the wayside? What is it that makes a company or a business group so sure of itself that it takes the bit between its teeth and pushes ahead, while other groups, some of them as old as a hundred years, just mark time? There is obviously some kind of chemistry at play, a chemical reaction between management and finance, or between management and state-of-the-art technology which perhaps ultimately decides why some companies and groups do so well and others languish, though both are often in the same business and operate in the same environment.

Take the case of India. A financial newspaper from Bombay has published a ranking list of top 101 companies for 1982-83. There are three Tata companies among the top ten, Tata Steel, Telco and Associated Cement, and only one Birla company, Gwalior Rayon. There are four foreign companies of which three, ITC, Ashok Leyland and Hindustan Lever, have multinational connections. Of the remaining two, there is one, Reliance Textiles, which was not even heard of 15 years ago, but which is now No. 3, with total assets of Rs 506 crore, only slightly less than those of Telco which is almost 40 years old. There is also another newcomer in the list, Larsen & Toubro, with a capital of less than half that of Telco but increasing at a rate that is more than 10 times that of Telco. Both Reliance and Larsen & Toubro are Bombay-based Indian companies, though the latter was founded by two foreign engineers.

You might ask, what is so wonderful about all this? It is true that the ranking doesn't tell very much until you start comparing them with previous lists. The only list I could get hold of was one prepared in 1964 by an orgnisation called Economic and Scientific Research Foundation which was among the first to compile such lists on the lines of *Fortune*'s top 500. The 20-year-old list has Tata Steel at the top and also contains the names of Telco and Associated Cement, but all other names, with the exception of Imperial Tobacco (now known as ITC) have vanished from the top 10 of 1982. The 18-year period between 1964 and 1982 seems to have played havoc with India's corporate sector. Scindia Steam which used to be No. 5 is now No. 16, and DCM has tumbled from No. 6 to No. 12. Tata Power has taken an even bigger plunge (from No. 8 to No. 18) and so have Premier Automobiles (from No. 9 to No. 64) and Orient Paper from No. 10 to No. 59. And one company, Indian Iron & Steel, which used to be No. 2 in the old list has disappeared from the corporate scene altogether, having been swallowed up first by Hindustan Steel and then by Steel Authority of India.



BIAS FOR ACTION

Why did Indian Iron & Steel, once a premier Bengal-based company and the flagship of the famous Martin & Burn group, just go under? What is it that brought Hindustan Lever from No. 25 to No. 9, and Larsen & Toubro from No. 75 to No. 10, all in a span of no more than 18 years? In India, we do not bother to seek answers to such questions, and there must be people who just shrug their shoulders and blame everything on fate. But they don't do so in the US where nothing is left to fate and nothing is taken for granted. Two management experts, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman, both of McKinsey & Co, have tried to find out what makes successful corporations tick. Their study (*In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*, Harper & Row, New York) is confined solely to US corporations but their conclusions have universal validity. The surprising answer is: companies go under because they are just not good enough.



CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Peters and Waterman have a simple definition of what constitutes a good company: good companies are innovative companies that are not only unusually good at whatever it is that they produce and sell, but are especially adroit at continually responding to change of any sort in their environment. A company is a living social and economic organism which changes when the environment changes. As the needs of their customers shift, the skills of their competitors improve, the mood of the public changes, the forces of international trade realign themselves, and government regulations shift, these companies tack, revamp, adjust, transform and adapt. In short, as a whole culture, they innovate, and companies that achieve that kind of innovative and adaptive performance are labelled 'excellent' companies.

A total of 14 companies were selected for study. They are household names in the US though not many are known here. On the surface, they have little in common; there is no universality of product line. Three are in high technology, one is in packaged goods, one makes medical products, two are service businesses, two are involved in project management, and five are basic industrial manufacturers. But each is an hands-on operator, not a holding company or a conglomerate. And while not every plan succeeds, in the day-to-day pursuit of their businesses, these companies plans succeed far more often than they fail.

They found eight basic practices to be characteristic of successfully managed companies. Many of these ideas are considered part of management's conventional wisdom in highly profitable Japanese corporations, but few were found to be in common practice in the majority of business concerns in the US. Peters and Waterman examine why and how the eight basics work.

The first basic is a bias for action, for getting on with it. Even though the companies may be analytical in their approach to decision-making, they are not paralysed by that fact, as so many others seem to be. In many of these companies, the standard operating practice is, "Do it, try it, fix it." When there is a big problem at Digital Equipment, one of the 14 companies studied, they grab ten senior guys and stick them in a room for a week. They come up with an answer and implement it. This was also President Roosevelt's philosophy during the famous New Deal. "Try anything," he used to say, "if it doesn't work, try something else, but for God's sake keep trying."



AUTONOMY

Moreover the companies are always experimenting with something or the other. Instead of allowing 250 engineers and marketeers to work on a new product

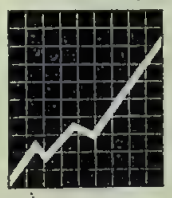
in isolation for 15 months, they form bands of 5 to 25 and test ideas out on a customer, often with inexpensive prototypes, within a matter of weeks.

The second basic is "get close to the customer". These companies learn from the people they serve. They provide unparalleled quality, service and reliability—things that work and last. IBM's marketing vice-president says: "It's a shame that, in so many companies, whenever you get good service, it's an exception." Not so at the excellent companies. Everyone gets into the act. Many of the innovative companies got their best product ideas from customers. That comes from listening, regularly and intently.



LABOUR RELATIONS

Next comes autonomy and entrepreneurship. The innovative companies foster many leaders and many innovators throughout the organisation. 3M has been described as so intent on innovation that its essential atmosphere seems not like that of a large corporation but rather a loose network of laboratories and cubbyholes populated by feverish inventors and dauntless entrepreneurs who let their imagination fly in all directions. They don't try to hold everyone on so short a rein that he can't be creative. They encourage practical risk taking and support good tries. They make sure that "you generate a reasonable number of mistakes".



BUSINESS SENSE

Then there is the approach to labour. The excellent companies treat the rank and file as the root source of quality and productivity gain. They do not foster we/they labour attitudes or regard capital investment as the fundamental source of efficiency improvement. Every worker is seen as a source of ideas, not just as a pair of hands.



CENTRALISATION & DECENTRALISATION

"Never acquire a business you don't know how to run," could be another slogan. While there are a few exceptions, the odds for excellent performance seem strongly to favour those companies that stay reasonably close to businesses they know. The only group in India which "sticks to the knitting" is Kirloskar. Their chief, S.L. Kirloskar, has said for years that they have stuck to engineering because that is the only business they know well.

The underlying structural forms and systems in excellent companies are elegantly simple. Top level staff are lean; it is not uncommon to find a corporate staff of fewer than 100 people running multi-billion-dollar enterprises. Very few companies are formally run with a matrix organisation structure, and some which had tried that form have abandoned it.

The excellent companies are both centralised and decentralised. For the most part, they have pushed autonomy down to the shop floor or product development team. On the other hand, they can be fanatic centralists around the few core values they hold dear. 3M is marked by barely organised chaos surrounding its product champions. At Digital, the chaos is so rampant that one executive said: "Damn few people here know who they work for." Yet Digital's fetish for reliability and quality is more rigidly adhered to than any outsider can imagine.

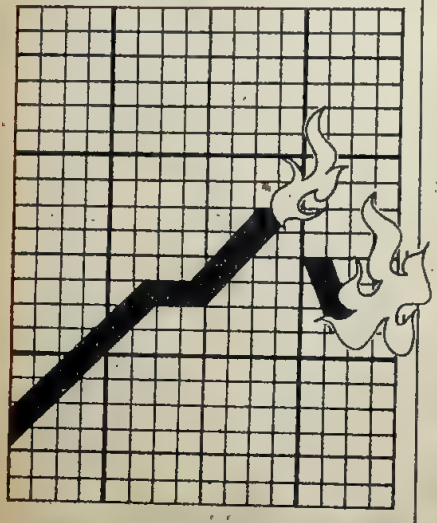
Most of these eight attributes are not startling, say the authors. The successful companies live their commitment to people, as they also do their preference for action—any action—over countless standing committees and endless 500-page studies, their fetish about quality and service standards that others, using optimisation techniques, would consider pipe dreams; and their insistence on regular initiative (practical autonomy) from tens of thousands,not just 200 designated highly paid 'thinkers'.

Above all, say the authors, the intensity itself, stemming from strongly held beliefs marks these companies. The language used in talking about people is different. The expectation of regular contributions is different. The love of the product and the customer is palpable. "And we felt different ourselves, walking around a Hewlett-Packard or 3M facility watching groups at work and play, from the way we had in most of the more bureaucratic institutions we had experience with. It was watching busy bands of engineers, salesmen and manufacturers casually hammering out problems in a conference room; even a customer was there. It was seeing a Hewlett-Packard division manager's office (Rs 100-crore unit) tiny, well-less, on the factory floor, shared with a secretary. It was seeing Digital's new chairman bear-hugging a colleague in the hall after lunch in the headquarters. It was very far removed from silent board rooms marked by dim lights, sombre presentations, rows of staffers lined up along the walls with calculators glowing, and the endless click of the slide projector as analysis after analysis lit up the screen."

What it all boils down to is this: successful companies are good at organising talent. There are two elements in this: first, you have to spot talent and nurse it as you go along; and second, you have to organise it in such a way that the innovative instinct does not die out in the process. Americans have always been very good at organising talent, much better than, say, the Europeans, who seem to shun it. The British, from whom we have copied our management styles, are probably the worst and end up bureaucratising everything, from the kind of tea that is served to junior executives grade one, to the size of their desks. The Japanese tend to go to the other extreme. On a Japanese shop floor, it is virtually impossible to tell the worker and the manager apart. They eat in the same canteen, drink the same tea, use more or less the same company transport, and dress in the same uniform. Their management culture is not all that different from the kind of culture successful companies in the US try to create around their organisation.

In India, of course, things are different, but the basics should hold good here also. If Reliance has come from nowhere to grab the No. 3 position, there must be a very good reason for it. It says something for the tenacity and business acumen of Dhirubhai Ambani that he should have gone to the top, or nearly so, not with an engineering or chemicals group which should have been understandable, but on the strength of textiles, a much maligned business activity that everybody is trying to get out of, including century-old textile companies who believe that the business is a stone round their neck. There was only one textile company in the top ten of 1964 and that was DCM. Now also there is only one textile company among the top ten of 1982, but it is not DCM but Reliance. What made Dhirubhai Ambani take the bit between his teeth and push ahead with textiles? Was it the only business he knew? Did he have managers who knew only about textiles and nothing else? We do not know, but I think we should try and find out.

What will things be like 20 years from now? I have a feeling that the Indian corporate sector is in for a great deal of churning and maybe at least half the companies in the top ten group will fail to make the grade, just as half the companies in 1964 were out of the picture 20 years later.



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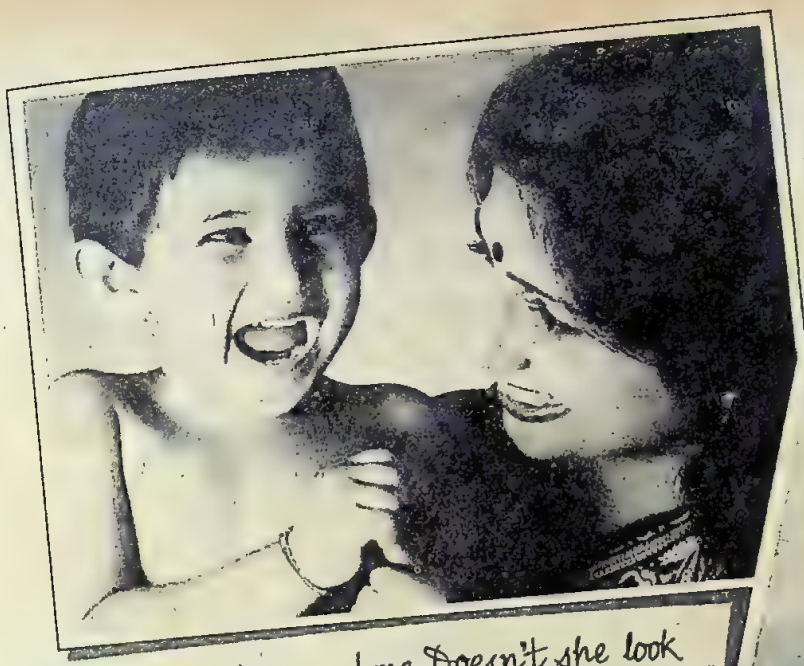
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ESCORTS

Shadow Boxing

ESCORTS shareholders hogged the spotlights last fortnight in the continuing battle between company Chairman H.P. Nanda and London-based marauder Swraj Paul for control of the company. A meeting called to sack the majority on the board of directors had a stormy start, with strong protests, endless procedural wrangles, repeated adjournments, and effective filibustering among the board members and all those present.

But that, in a sense, was not the real action, which was taking place behind the scenes. Compromise moves were being initiated in Delhi, major documentary disclosures were being made in Bombay, and in London, Swraj Paul decided that he would pay a quick visit to India—a clear indication that the action was hotting up.

The shareholders' meeting, which was planned as a serious business quickly took on the form of farce when shareholders stalled proceedings on a variety of counts: objecting first to the proposal to replace company Chairman H.P. Nanda with a Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) nominee as chairman of the meeting, then seeking to adjourn the meeting itself till the Bombay High Court hearings on the legality of the LIC requisition were over, proposing a vote of no confidence in Nanda's stand-in (a lawyer named B. Sen), and much else.

The result of this was that the meeting, first convened on June 9, adjourned for the counting of votes on electing a chairman, re-convened on June 11, then adjourned again when two more protest resolutions were put to vote, is now scheduled to convene for third time on June 16. Unless there are further objections from the floor, and continued filibustering, the LIC resolutions that seek the replacing of a majority of Escorts directors will finally be put to vote at this third section.

Given the majority voting power of the LIC and other financial institutions, the outcome of any resolution is a foregone conclusion. But last fortnight's meetings also showed that Nanda enjoyed the overwhelming support and confidence of the shareholders present. For although only a few shareholders spoke at the meetings, with some of them almost monopolising the microphones, the repeated claps and cheers for Nanda left little doubt that popular sentiment was against the institutions. More important, the delays mean that the results of the meeting will be known only after the Bombay High Court hearings start on June 18, thus making the issue sub-judice and preventing a legal coup by the LIC.

If proceedings continue to remain stalled, even on June 16, the LIC could well pursue the alternative course of proposing similar resolutions for the regular annual shareholders' meeting, to be held on June 30. And the possibility was not ruled out of a complaint being made to the courts that the meetings were being stalled through careful orchestration by the management, though this would be difficult to prove.

The more interesting manoeuvres, however, were being made far away from the arc lights. Some of these moves had been in preparation for last fortnight's shareholders' meeting, while others related to the equally crucial court case in Bombay.

Bent on securing for himself a moral victory at the shareholders' meeting, Nanda had launched a fierce hunt for proxy votes from shareholders who would not be attending the meeting, and eventually got proxies from slightly over half the company's 16,000 shareholders. The frantic effort did meet with some measure of success: along with Nanda's own shareholding, this represented a combined voting strength of slightly more than the 30 per cent that the LIC has.

The Government and the LIC were, meanwhile, doing their own footwork to prevent the institutions from appearing to be isolated among the shareholders' gathering. But the LIC's half-hearted proxy hunt yielded no more than 200 proxies. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chipped in, however, with an unusual order to four banks with whom Nanda and his companies had pledged some of their shares in return for loans. A clause in the loan agreements had stipulated that if the banks used these votes in any shareholders' meeting, they would have to be used in support of any move made by the financial institutions. The RBI instructed the banks that in this particular case they were not to abstain from the voting, and to compulsorily vote for the institutions—a case of Nanda's votes being used against him.

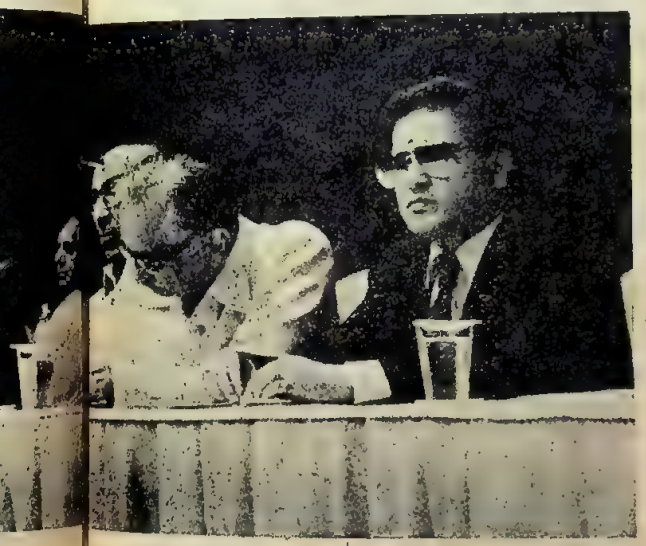
HARI OM GULATI



Nanda and members of the Escorts board at the meeting

Anxious to prevent this, Nanda shopped around frantically for money to repay three of the four banks and release the over five lakh shares pledged to them. But in one of the biggest let-downs of last year, he found to his dismay that none of his fellow-industrialists were willing to lend him the money — apparently for fear of inviting reprisals from the Government. But fortunately for him the money was found, and the shares released in time.

In the case of the fourth bank, where a further 2.5 lakh shares were pledged, Nanda tried to transfer the loan to a Dubai-based bank which would be immune from RBI directives regarding voting. But time seemed to have run out for him, and much to his disappointment, the deal did not go through for the shares to be released before June 9.



The Government, meanwhile, was moving on other fronts. A senior Finance Ministry official made an effort to get both Escorts and DCM (the second company under attack by Swraj Paul) de-listed from the Delhi Stock Exchange as penalty for their refusal to register Paul's share purchases. The stock exchange authorities did not oblige.

Another oblique attack came in the context of a case in the Calcutta High Court regarding votes on shares sold to Paul, with the petitioner demanding that those who had sold their shares to Paul should not give their proxies to Nanda. A prominent Calcutta lawyer confessed that a central minister had gone to the extent of advising him not to appear for Nanda in the case. The lawyer reportedly replied that if he could not appear for Nanda, he would not appear against him either.

Meanwhile, papers being filed before the Bombay High Court threw fresh light on past events. An affidavit filed by the RBI yielded correspondence between the RBI and the Punjab National Bank, Paul's bankers. This showed clearly that Paul's initial share purchases had been without the RBI's permission, that the RBI had strongly objected to this and asked the bank to explain how it had allowed payments to be made by Paul to his brokers. In response to this, the bank first argued that no RBI permission was necessary, but eventually confessed to a technical omission.

In the correspondence, Punjab National Bank also claimed that Paul had not bought any shares before March 1983, when his first payment came in. But Paul himself had told journalists in Delhi that he had ordered his brokers to start buying as early as December 1982, and that the purchases started in January 1983. The two companies' stock market prices in fact started shooting up around then, with DCM shares rising from Rs 35 to almost Rs 50 in February alone, signalling major buying.

The RBI affidavit also shows that it had initially declared Paul's 13 investing companies as ineligible to invest under the non-resident investment scheme. However, this decision was overruled by the central Government in September last year.

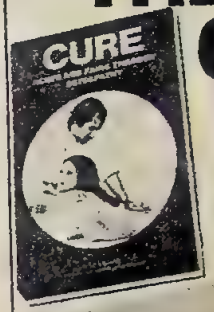
While these disclosures would help Nanda in his court battle, it was nevertheless impossible to make any assessment of who had the upper hand in an increasingly complex war of attrition. At one level, the fate of the extraordinary shareholders' meeting remained unknown. At another, the counter-moves possibly planned by LIC remained undisclosed. Meanwhile, the Bombay High Court was due on June 18 to start hearing Nanda's petition against the Government, the RBI and LIC. Through all this, Nanda seemed to be quite anxious to launch a peace offensive.

Significantly, in an unexpected change of schedule, Swraj Paul advanced a planned visit to India from July to mid-June. The last time he visited the country, in late 1983, the financial institutions started turning the screws on Nanda. But Nanda himself seemed to be stocking up on explosive legal ammunition, and it was difficult to assess whether there would be fresh fireworks this time, or a quick compromise. On balance, but more than at any other time in the last year, the odds seemed to be in favour of a settlement.

— T.N. NINAN

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COMPUTERS

Learning Shops

EVERY morning for two weeks, Vikram Kandhari, a fresh-faced 21-year-old commerce graduate, has made his way to a three-storey building in one of New Delhi's better residential colonies. This is the Delhi branch of the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) which offers a dozen-odd courses in computer applications. Kandhari has paid Rs 1,500 for the privilege of learning the BASIC programming language by watching video tapes and slides in an overhead slide projector; he will also get about 50 hours on the institute's mini computer and at the end of this concentrated bout of learning will be able to—so his tutors claim—write a reasonably good 200-line program. Says Kandhari: "I'm going to the United States for a masters in business administration and there, if you don't know anything about computers, you are considered illiterate. Hence this course."

Kandhari is only one of thousands of young men and women crowding an estimated 350 private computer training schools in the country, paying a fee which is rarely less than Rs 1,000 for the average short term course in any one of the computer languages: BASIC, COBOL, PASCAL, FORTRAN, in systems analysis and design, and other computer-related applications. The organisations include the better ones such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay—a one-year course for Rs 2,500 which includes an enormous amount of computer time—to sophisticated set-ups like NIIT—which trains about 1,000 students every year. The public sector Computer Maintenance Corporation also runs courses, as does the Computer Society of India, an association of professionals and academics. But the scene is dominated by teaching shops begun by data processing firms with computer time to spare.

None of the courses, not even the better institutes, are recognised by the Government, but that doesn't stop people from starting new ones. The reasons are simple: there will be an estimated 12,000 job openings in computer user firms in the next 12 months. The salaries are good: Rs 1,000 a month for a beginner programmer, with a figure three times that after three years' experience. And the market abroad is even better—agents from American firms reportedly approach IIT undergraduates with the offer of a job and a fat pay packet in the US.

Since the IIT's and engineering colleges can satisfy only about a quarter of the domestic market, the mushrooming teaching shops make hay. P. Aruna is studying COBOL at the Delhi Institute of Management Services (DIMS) and says: "I may not get a job with just a B.Sc. in home science but with a diploma in computer programming my brother assures me I will get a good job for Rs 4,000 a month in the US." Rajeev Sabberwal, an engineering undergraduate who is studying programming at the grandly-named Institute of Computer Studies in Delhi adds: "With both these qualifications I can be sure of getting a starting salary of Rs 1,500."

Few of the students have any illusions about what they are getting into when they pay the fees. One student, who took up the course on the advice of his brother settled in Saudi Arabia, says: "This is only a beginner's course. There is little practical training. We hardly get any time on the computers and most of the time they don't work properly." Another even comments cynically that "the teachers themselves don't seem to know what they teach". But they realise that the teaching shops are the only opening into the profession of the 20th century, and despite the sketchy nature of the lessons and the thrifty doles of computer time they keep coming, lured by the 'guaranteed job placement' offers that the training schools never fail to make.

Despite the sketchy nature of the lessons and the thrifty doles of computer time the computer schools offer, the students keep coming, lured by the 'guaranteed job placement' offers that the schools never fail to make.

The main point about most of the computer teaching schools is that they have 'degraded', in the words of a computer professional, an important discipline to the level of a hack diploma course. An established polytechnic in Delhi offers seven computer courses—with prices ranging from over Rs 3,000 for an all-purpose diploma in computer programming to Rs 600 for a key punching course—as part of a bulging list of courses taking in everything from flower arrangement to business management. The computer room is a tiny cramped wood-walled cubicle which can barely accommodate two students, an instructor—a former chemist who got his diploma from the same place—and a mini computer which is used for other jobs in between students. The director says he has "no difficulty in placing students in jobs as we have good contacts in the industry". With industry executives moonlighting in his organisation for Rs 50 a lecture and two lectures a day, this is no idle boast.

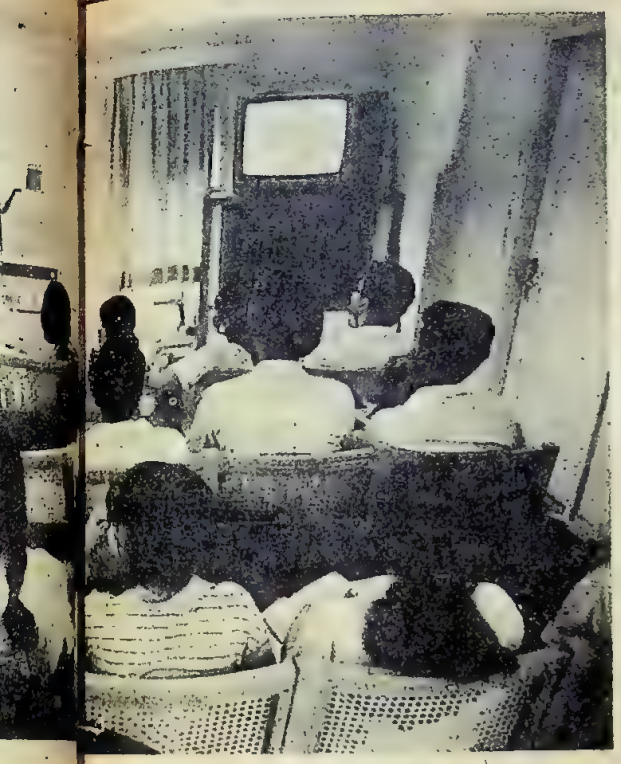


BHAWAN SINGH

A computer class: mushrooming tribe

Another enterprising polytechnic offers the same enormous number of courses; its director also runs a flourishing consultancy business for about 100 firms so he, too, admits that "jobs for the boys is no problem at all". The polytechnic has just bought an in-house computer of Indian make which will be used for the teaching. It will also be used, says the director proudly, to process data for a matrimonial matching service.

The rudimentary instruction which passes for teaching in the vast majority of such institutes—their favourite name—is brought out starkly in the only



nation-wide test so far of computer skills: The Computer Society of India's National Standard Test for Computer Programming—unrecognised by the Government. Last year, a total of 483 students took the test for COBOL, FORTRAN and PASCAL; 43 passed, only 15 of them in the first division. That kind of result is inevitable when, as a survey by a data bank firm, Constellate Consultants of Delhi, makes clear, 20 per cent of the teaching shops are no more than typing schools; Constellate has also brought out the first computer directory in India and its Editor Prithvi Haldea says: "It's the ultimate fast buck business. The user firms which are forced to take these diploma holders for want of anything else invariably find that they have to train them for at least half a year before they can trust them with a computer."

HALDEA has a point. Industry executives and professionals are unanimous on one thing: the quality of the people churned out by the average teaching shop is, with a few exceptions, mediocre. Says Dr N. Seshagiri, director, National Informatics Centre: "Learning programming in one of these courses is like learning music in two weeks. But we have to take them, and train them up for about six months as we have no choice." Adds N. Sanyal, deputy manager, planning and electronic data processing, Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd, Calcutta: "I never entertain such candidates. One person who came to me knew nothing about programming but since he was a relative of one of my colleagues I offered him a bit of training on our computer. Eventually, the chap became a good programmer and got a job elsewhere."

The main reason for the low level of proficiency is that the students do not get much computer time. Most of the schools ask their students to work in groups of four or five. Gurpreet Singh, a COBOL student at the International Institute of Computer Studies in Delhi, complains: "We are driven to parcelling out a single program between five students and even then it is the data entry operator who does the actual keying. Unless we interact with the computer we won't learn anything."

Another reason for the poor quality of the students is the nature of the teaching. The director of a Bombay data processing organisation, which also runs courses on the side, admits: "To emphasise just programming is meaningless. What we need is a system where experts in fields such as accounting, engineering, design and so on help analysts and programmers design their programs." The manager of the computer centre of a prominent public sector concern goes further: "There should be courses such as account programming, engineering design programming and so on. Unless we come out with such specific, practical courses we will continue to get half-baked professionals who do not know how to use their learning."

BHAWAN SINGH



Students working on a computer

There are a few, desperately few, private institutes which are more than just money-making factories. NIIT is one, with its high-tech emphasis on the objective approach to learning—disseminated through a collection of slickly brought out textbooks—backed up by liberal use of video and projection techniques. Says Director Rajendra Pawar: "The idea is to get the student to really learn something and not just teach him something." His institute offers on-job-training for three months at a fee of Rs 250 a month. A diligent student, claims Pawar, can get at least 75 hours of computer time during on-job-training and he adds that very few students flunk the training and fail to get jobs. He complains that the "fly-by-night operators have lowered standards to a vast extent and created the impression that only drop-outs from other disciplines get into computers".

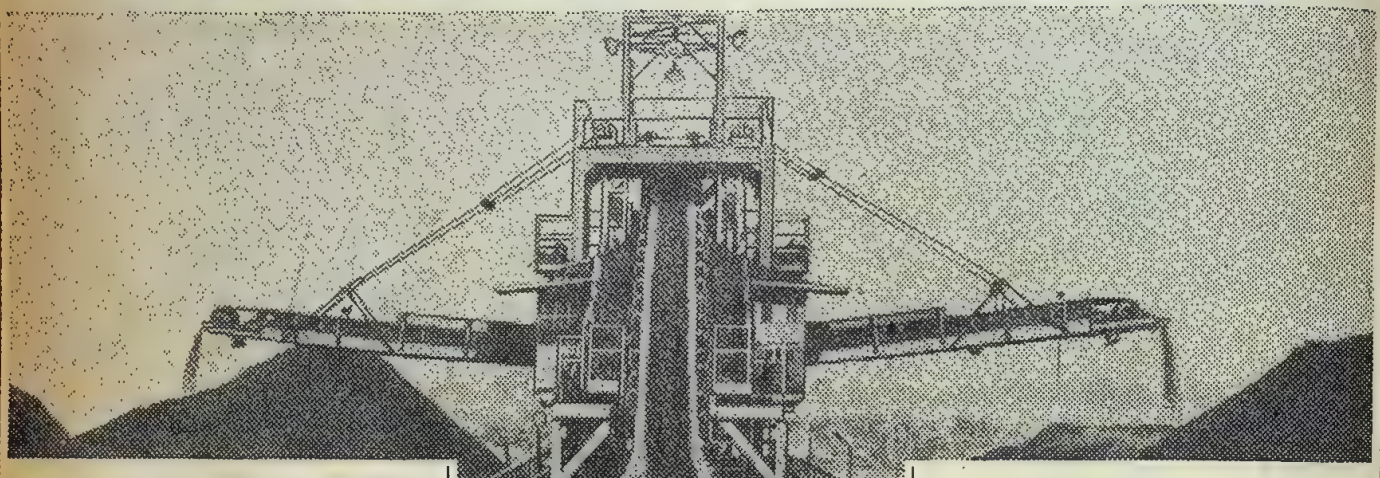
Informatics Computers Systems (ICS) of Delhi, too, is doing authentic work, especially in schools. Its Director, Anil Malhotra, started ICS primarily as a consultancy set-up, got interested in school computer training—one of his accounts is Mayo College of Ajmer—and has progressed to courses for adults. Says Malhotra: "Our students get as much computer time as they like." Agrees Kanwardeep Juneja, who has just finished school, and says he spends hours at the ICS mini computer: "This is one place you can really learn something, with no one hassling you about time limits."

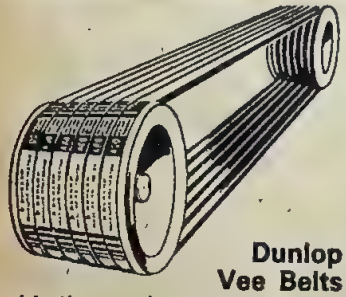
Such organisations are few and far between, though. Thankfully, there are indications that the days of the teaching shops, at least of the more opportunistic ones, may be numbered. The Government has begun a number of courses which should see an additional 1,500 or so properly trained computer personnel in the market starting next year. Over the years, the capacity is reportedly going to expand to about five times that. The Government has also realised the importance of computer awareness and is starting a computer project for 250 schools.

India needs computer professionals as never before, with even small organisations going in for the versatile and compact microcomputers. The Delhi-based Manufacturers' Association for Information Technology estimates that the manufacturing sector alone will require 100,000 personnel by the end of the decade. And if India is to raise its software exports from Rs 20 crore to a targeted Rs 100 crore in the next three years, the skilled manpower requirement will be even larger.

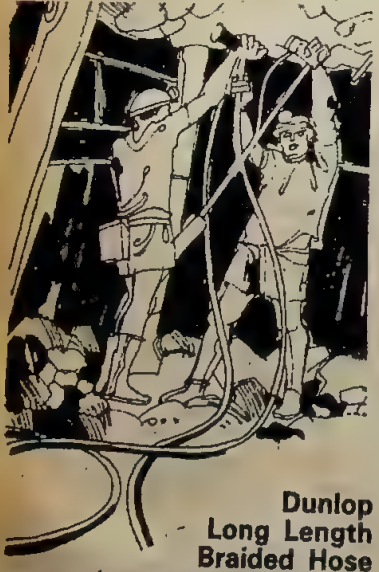
—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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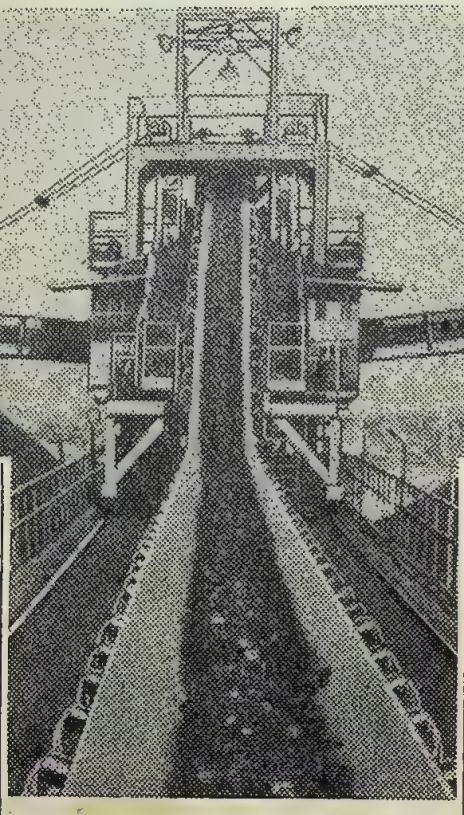




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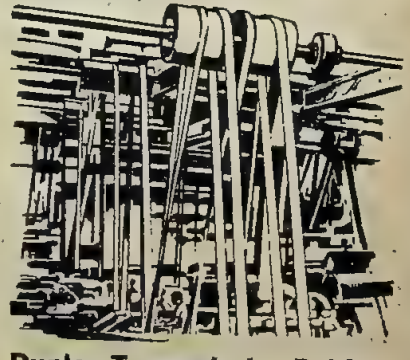


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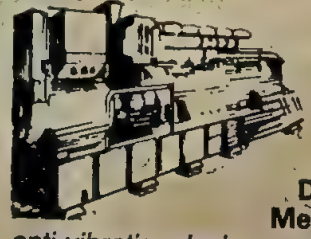
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PUBLIC SECTOR

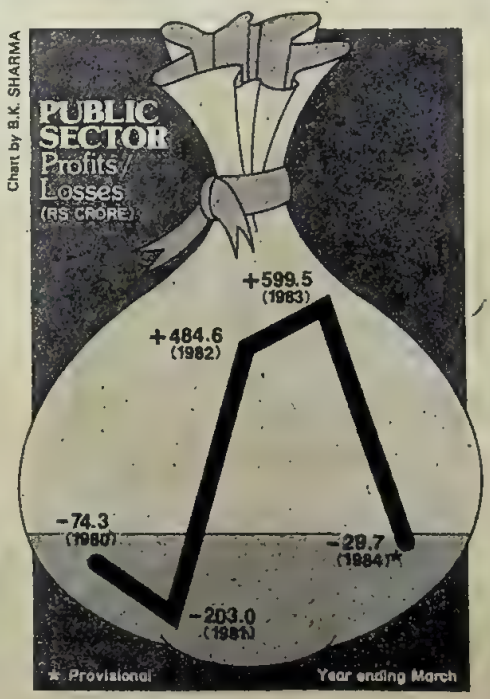
Poor Performance

THE PUBLIC sector is back in the red ink, with a minor splash. After two good years of profits from the 200-odd companies owned by the Central Government, 1983-84 has seen a return to the wayward results of earlier years. Preliminary results show a total loss of Rs 30 crore on a mammoth turnover of Rs 46,777 crore, achieved after an investment of close to Rs 30,000 crore. A year earlier, the companies had turned in profits of Rs 599 crore.

In numerous sectors, the deterioration in performance is self-evident. The coal companies suffered a staggering loss of Rs 269 crore, up sharply from a marginal loss of Rs 6 crore the previous year. The steel companies did no better: from a profit of Rs 60 crore in 1982-83, they slipped to a loss of Rs 211 crore last year. Falling in with this pattern, the textile companies under the National Textile Corporation saw their losses shoot up from less than Rs 10 crore to Rs 111 crore. Among themselves, the 15 biggest losers incurred a total loss of well over Rs 1,000 crore.

If the over-all loss is still at a manageable Rs 30 crore, the credit goes largely to the oil companies. Helped by the high price that the Government pays for its oil, and by the increased production of recent years, the oil companies have been having a field day since 1981. Without their profits, the public sector as a whole would have been in the red in 1981-82 and 1982-83 as well. But last year, despite the 11 oil companies turning in profits of Rs 960 crore, the public sector as a whole ended up in the red.

The losses may not always be the public sector companies' fault, as their managing directors and government spokesmen are quick to point out. Coal India Chairman M.S. Gujral argues, for instance, that the coal companies would have turned in a far better financial performance if the coal price rise that came towards the end of the year had been announced earlier. He hopes now to end the current year in the black. Likewise, the steel companies would have produced less embarrassing financial results if the Government had not dithered endlessly on a price hike for steel products. Steel and Mines Minister N.K.P. Salve insisted last fortnight that the Steel Authority of India's financial results are not yet finalised, suggesting indirectly that a belated decision on a price hike could have some fall-out benefits in terms of the public sector steel companies' contribution to the steel development fund, and thereby help reduce their losses. Similarly, the Delhi Transport Corporation remains among the biggest public sector liabilities because of the Government's refusal to consider raising bus fares in the capital



—among the lowest in the country. In contrast, companies that benefited from price hikes during the year were able to register sharp improvements in their financial performance: two examples being Hindustan Copper and Hindustan Zinc, both of which turned in small profits last year after suffering losses in 1982-83. A spokesman of the Bureau of Public Enterprises also argued that many units were adversely affected last year by sharp increases in workers' pay packets that were negotiated.

On the brighter side, many of the companies that registered losses have in fact shown improvements in productivity during the year. Steel Authority Chairman S. Samarapungavan pointed out, for example, that though the production of saleable steel production dropped last year, total hot metal production was up because of a 40 per cent pick-up in the output of pig iron, so that productivity did not in fact register any fall. The coal companies, likewise, saw production improving during the year. And in the case of Bharat Aluminium, capacity utilisation picked up from a low 43 per cent in 1982-83 to a more respectable 61 per cent last year—despite which the company incurred losses of Rs 31 crore.

Engineering companies like Burn Standard and Jessop have also done relatively well, with even the chronically trouble-prone Mining and Allied Machinery Corporation showing some improvement. Nevertheless, there is no getting away from the fact that the performance of all too many companies leaves a great deal to be desired. And the 15 biggest losers have steadily increased their losses instead of reducing them—from Rs 272 crore in 1979-80 to Rs 509 crore in 1981-82 and over Rs 1,000 crore last year. Also, in an area like inventory control there is ample evidence of gross mismanagement: the heavy engineering companies carried stocks equal to seven months' production, while even the trading companies carried five months' stocks. The interest burden alone on these enormous inventories would have contributed substantially to the companies' losses, a fact that is certainly true of the various steel companies.

Meanwhile, among the more interesting efforts at bringing about a quick improvement in public sector performance was that of the Department of Mines, which controls six public sector companies in the field of non-ferrous metals. Forcing the companies to submit detailed production-cum-profit plans, and then monitoring their performance so that they stuck to these, Mines Secretary P.K. Basu says that his department was able to pull three of the six companies out of the red, and reduce the losses of two others. Taken together, all six companies reduced their losses from over Rs 100 crore in 1982-83 to Rs 35 crore last year, while five of the six companies also registered sharp improvements in capacity utilisation.

Some of the financial improvement is the result of pricing decisions during the year, but Basu feels that wider acceptance of what he calls his "production-cum-profit management system" will help improve the performance of the public sector as a whole. Certainly, there seems little doubt that a greater all-round commitment to earning profits and producing more is badly needed in numerous public sector companies, and in their controlling departments. Without that, the current year might well see a further deterioration in the financial performance of the public sector.

—T.N. NINAN


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Political Adhesive

THE BATTLE for control of the Tamil Nadu-based India Cements Ltd took a new turn last fortnight, with the AIADMK Government elbowing its way into the scene. Following an earlier bid, the Government began seriously trying to buy a block of shares in the company with the apparent aim of sidelining N. Srinivasan, who has been trying to gain control. What began as a tussle between the sons of the two original promoters of the company—T.S. Narayanaswami and S.N.N. Sankaralinga Iyer—has thus taken on a political colouring. N. Srinivasan—the son of Narayanaswami—is said to be a close friend of Murasoli Maran, Rajya Sabha MP from the DMK, and the nephew of the party boss M. Karunanidhi. Not surprisingly, therefore, the AIADMK has aligned itself with Srinivasan's rival K.S. Narayanan, the son of Sankaralinga Iyer and a former managing director of the company.

In the process, however, both the principal rivals have been quietly eased off the centre-stage. Explaining the Government's motive, Industry Minister C. Ponnaiyan says: "Our only idea is to prevent a local company from going into the control of outside hands"—a reference to the abortive ITC bid in 1982 to gain control of the company. Srinivasan says he has withdrawn from the race because he does not want to raise a hornet's nest. More to the point, he doesn't have the money to go on a share-buying spree. But he's no passive observer, either. Determined to fight all AIADMK's efforts to wrest control of the company, Srinivasan has been doing some lobbying in Delhi. On the other hand, Narayanan, who bowed out of India Cements when he turned 60, has been buying up the company's shares through an investment firm in which he is a partner. He, however, claims his aim is merely to invest.

But for any take-over bid to succeed, the cooperation of the financial institutions would be necessary. The company has a paid-up capital of Rs 4.9 crore, of which the institutions hold the biggest chunk—49 per cent. Narayanan and his brother K.S. Raman together control nearly 11 per cent of the total shares. The other descendents of both the original promoters together own about 5 per cent, with the remaining 35 per cent distributed amongst assorted individual shareholders.

The state Government wants to acquire a 10-15 per cent stake in the company for a maximum price of Rs 10 crore. Industries Secretary V. Selvaraj says: "If the financial institutions agree to sell India Cements shares to us, we should find out at what price. The number of shares we buy will naturally depend on the price." A 10-15 per cent shareholding may be sufficient for the state Government to take charge of the company because the financial institutions are hardly likely to cross swords with state governments on company boards. Besides, major shareholders like Narayanan are not unfavourably disposed towards the Government, either.





The factory at Sankarnagar and (inset) Ponnaiyan: fight for control

Predictably, the DMK has challenged the state Government's reason for buying into India Cements. Murasoli Maran says: "The MGR Government had categorically told the Centre in 1982, at the time of the ITC share purchace, that it was not interested in buying India Cements shares." Maran points out that Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee had specifically said so in the Rajya Sabha in response to a question from him. "Why did the state Government subsequently stage a sudden volte face?" he asks irately.

Maran also claims that the state Government is being very inconsistent in its functioning. "It is not prepared to take over the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills and revive it. The Government has allowed bus routes to remain in the private sector. So why try to exercise control over only India Cements?" he asks. Maran's argument is that the company's shares are not doing badly, either, so some "other considerations" are involved. Certainly, investing in India Cements is an attractive proposition. From a cumulative loss of Rs 4.4 crore till March 31, 1981, the company made a nominal profit of Rs 9.67 lakh in 1981-82. The next year, the partial decontrol of cement in the Union budget of 1982 helped push up the company's profits to a very respectable Rs 9 crore.

In 1983-84, the profits dipped to Rs 4 crore, primarily due to the crippling shortage of power in the state. Says the company's Managing Director, T.M. Thomas: "In the last three years that I have been in charge, I have ploughed back Rs 18 crore into the company." He adds that in March, April and May this year, its plants produced 103 to 104 per cent of their installed capacity. What makes India Cements even more covetable is that because cement is a highly capital intensive industry, setting up a new plant would involve very high costs now.

Already, the AIADMK is making its presence felt in the affairs of the company. P. Sethurajan, a man who is believed to be close to the Madurai district leaders of the party, has acted as a go-between in a land acquisition deal. He put Rajagopal Naidu, who has bought land cheap from its original owners, in touch with the India Cements, to whom he hoped to sell it. Again, one of the partners of the Veluvan Roadways of Sankarnagar, a transport contractor for the company's Talayuthu factory, is related to Labour Minister S. Raghavanandam. And recently, K.M. Vijay Kumar and K. Ravindran, two close relatives of the chief minister's wife, V.M. Janaki, were inducted into the sales department of the company's Talayuthu factory.

If the institutions decide to oblige,

the shares may be sold to either the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation or the Tamil Nadu Industrial Investment Corporation. But the AIADMK seems to have already cemented its relationship with the company. And Narayanan may yet emerge from the wings to play a crucial role in future developments. —S.H. VENKATRAMANI

NALCO

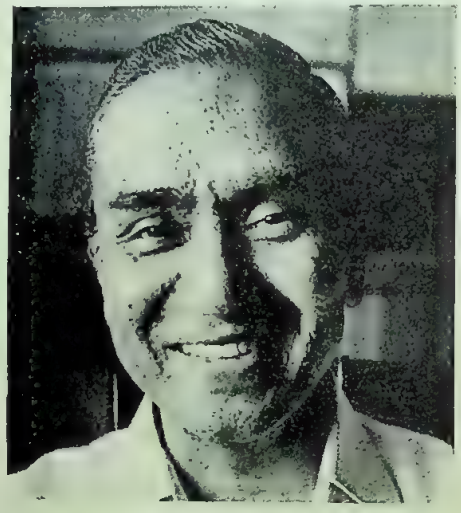
Double Trouble

AS a cauldron full of double trouble, the witches' brew in *Macbeth* may pale in comparison with the bubbling and boiling over that is taking place at the government-owned National Aluminium Company (NALCO). Managing Director K.V.B. Pantulu flew into Bhubaneswar last fortnight to set up a new head office there, only to be confronted with a lightning strike over a demand for an interim pay hike. Shortly before that, all three of the company's functional directors, handling finance, personnel and projects, had put in their papers and gone elsewhere, mostly in protest over being asked to shift from pampered Delhi to distant Bhubaneswar. And in between, Pantulu had had to give the Government the unwelcome news that the company's giant project for setting up 2.18 lakh tonnes production capacity, would cost not Rs 1,242 crore but a staggering Rs 2,068 crore, partly because of inflation and partly because the initial feasibility report understated the cost of the 650 mw captive power station. Further, the project would need an amount of $300 million more in foreign loans, on top of the $680 million that had already been contracted.

That was not all. Work at one of the project sites in Orissa was held up because land could not be acquired for the company. The state Government was causing yet other problems, demanding that all jobs in the giant company should go to local boys. And inter-union rivalry, with state political leaders pulling strings from a distance, had caused serious law and order problems in the project areas, with an engineer's family being killed a few months ago.

At the end of it all, the project may well end up as a white elephant. Half its production of alumina is supposed to be exported in order to repay the foreign loans that are helping finance it. But after the steep cost escalation, production cost per tonne of alumina will be Rs 2,600, whereas the ruling price on the London Metal Exchange (LME) is only Rs 2,000.

Pantulu has his hands full, and he knows it. NALCO is the second largest project in the entire country at the moment, next in size only to the Rs 4,000 crore Vishakhapatnam steel plant. And with barely 18 months to go before the commissioning date, and two monsoons in between to disrupt the pace of work, everything will have to go right from now on if he is to deliver the goods.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

With workers going on a lightning strike, three company directors resigning, and the project cost going up by Rs 800 crore, Managing Director K.V.B. Pantulu has his hands full.

He cannot be accused of not trying. The Central Government has been persuaded to clear the interim pay hike demanded by the staff, the state Government is being appeased by shifting the company's head office from New Delhi to Bhubaneswar, replacements have quickly been found for the three directors who left, and the project's arithmetic is being carefully re-worked to keep it viable.

Since he took charge last September, he has also stepped up the pace of work in a desperate attempt to make up for lost time. In his first six months he increased the number of workmen at the project sites from 12,000 to over 25,000, and the number of agencies handling different jobs at the sites went up from 42 to 72, while the pace of project spending was nearly doubled. By March, work on the bauxite mine, the alumina plant, the aluminium plant and the captive power station were all nearly abreast of the revised schedule.

But daunting tasks lie ahead. The Government will have to be persuaded to cough up the extra Rs 1,000 crore that is now needed to finish the project, and to dole it out in large enough dollops to ensure that the project does not get delayed. Ways will have to be found of making alumina exports profitable so that the foreign loans can be repaid. Pantulu argues that his production cost will be high only because domestic caustic soda, a vital raw material, costs three-and-a-half times the going rate abroad; and if he is allowed to import the caustic soda for export production, he will not suffer any losses on exports. Domestically, NALCO's production cost for aluminium will still be lower than the existing public sector producer of aluminium, Bharat Aluminium, which has a cost of Rs 21,000 per tonne against NALCO's estimated cost of Rs 18,195. But Bharat Aluminium is right now incurring heavy losses, and NALCO can only be saved by a favourable retention price formula that determines the price each aluminium producer gets from a common pool.

Sufficient demand for the company's products could be yet another unexpected problem. When NALCO was first conceived in the early 1980s, demand for aluminium in 1988-89 was projected at 8 lakh tonnes. This has now been revised downward to just 4.21 lakh tonnes—a sharp scaling down that makes a mockery of planning while leaving a giant project in the lurch.

While this problem is a worry for the future, the labour problems and land acquisition headaches need immediate solutions. Despite the fact that all non-executive jobs are being filled from the local employment exchanges, and in spite of providing compensation, transit houses, ex gratia payments as well as jobs with contractors for all those who have been displaced by land acquisition, problems remain over demands for jobs for the local people. And the project authorities' relations with the state Government are not all that they should be.

As one of the key men who commissioned the Kudremukh iron ore project on time, Pantulu has the experience and the ability to see NALCO through its project problems. But if a hostile local environment, chaotic finances and other problems prove too much, NALCO will join the list of public sector companies that failed to commission their plants on time, and then plunged straight into red ink.

—T.N. NINAN

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MALAYALAM PLANTATIONS

The Mystery Sale

IS IT a coup? Is it a sell out? Or is it a compromise? Nobody really knows, but it will take a long time for the dust to settle on the controversial decision taken by Malayalam Plantations India Ltd (MPI) to sell its 1,100 hectare Ambanad estate to Peninsular Plantations Ltd for Rs 1.36 crore.

Trade union leaders at the estate say the price should have been much higher; minority shareholders argue that the sale is incomprehensible at a time when both tea and rubber are fetching record prices and the plantation industry is doing very well for itself; workers threaten to not allow the new owner to enter the estate; and a clerk at the estate has filed a high court petition concerning MPI's mismanagement of its affairs.

The sale of the estate was rushed through against the backdrop of a determined bid by Peninsular to grab not just one estate but a substantial chunk of the shares of Malayalam Plantations, which is the largest plantation group in south India. Peninsular is owned by a locally well-known corporate raider, Ramakrishna Sharma, who already has quite a few plantation take-overs under his belt, including the Travancore Rubber and Tea Company.

While the precise mechanics of the attempted take over of MPI are difficult to assess because well over half the company's shares are held abroad, Sharma was reported to have cornered 10 per cent of the company's shares earlier this year, the acquisitions being made through Peninsular and Peermedu Tea Ltd, of which Sharma is general manager. MPI's board transferred the first lot of shares to Sharma, but then rejected a second lot. Sharma promptly took the issue to court with a plea that the share transfers be registered, but MPI shot back with a detailed objection that both plantations, Peninsular Plantations and Peermedu Tea were controlled by the same group of investors.

Then, in a quick change of tune, MPI decided on March 31 to sell the Ambanad estate to Peninsular Plantations, and to hand over possession the very next day. Ten days later, the share issue was settled out of court, and by the time the company's shareholders were called to a meeting on April 30, it was all over.

While several questions have arisen from the deal, the central issue is simple: did the management of Malayalam Plantations pay an exorbitant price to get Sharma off its back? Could the Ambanad estate have fetched much more on the open market, as trade union leaders allege, and did the management buy back Sharma's shareholdings at the dream price of Rs 75 per share when the ruling price in Bombay in early April was barely half that level? If so, was this not a heavy cost to pay simply to help the management keep its position unchallenged?

The MPI Chairman, P.J. Weavers, who is due to retire this year, declined to comment on the controversy. His secretary dismissed the subject, saying "we cannot waste time on such trivial matters". Other company directors maintained an equally tight-lipped silence, and Sharma explained the entire transaction with engaging simplicity: "There is nothing wrong in the deal. MPI wanted to sell and we bought. And in order to raise a part of the finance, we sold some of our MPI shares." He denied that he had been jockeying for a place on the MPI board. "How can I own a company which still has majority foreign holding?" he asked.

The answer to that may lie in reports that have been doing the rounds of MPI's overseas shareholders wanting to sell out. Sharma may have tried to step in at what he thought was the right moment. But his move clearly backfired. Stock-market circles in the state also mention two other suitors, one an operator from Madras and the second none other than London-based Swraj Paul, who bought three tea companies in Assam a few years ago.

Whatever its background, the sale has created a furore. Trade union leaders allege that Ambanad estate could have fetched much more than Rs 1.36. They calculate that in timber alone Sharma can make Rs 1 crore. P.S. Cherian, one of the union leaders, points out that "areas under rubber in the locality now sell for Rs 30,000 per hectare, while land under tea is worth Rs 10,000 per hectare". The estate has 584 hectares under tea, 298 hectares under rubber and a further 286 hectares of ancilliary land. If Cherian's figures are accurate, the estate could certainly have fetched the company Rs 2.5 crore.

While the deal itself has gone through, several bones of contention remain. For one thing, over a thousand workers on the estate have not been paid for the past month. And given their opposition to Sharma's ownership of the estate he has been forced to seek police protection to enter the estate.

He has also started court action to prevent MPI from going through with a move to merge the company with its sister concern, Harrison and Crossfield India Ltd—a move that was apparently initiated when Sharma was buying shares in MPI. Until these issues are sorted out, there will be no return to the normally placid atmosphere of the plantation scene in south India.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI



SREEDHAR PILLAI



Protest flags at Ambanad estate (top) and workers at a combined unions' meeting

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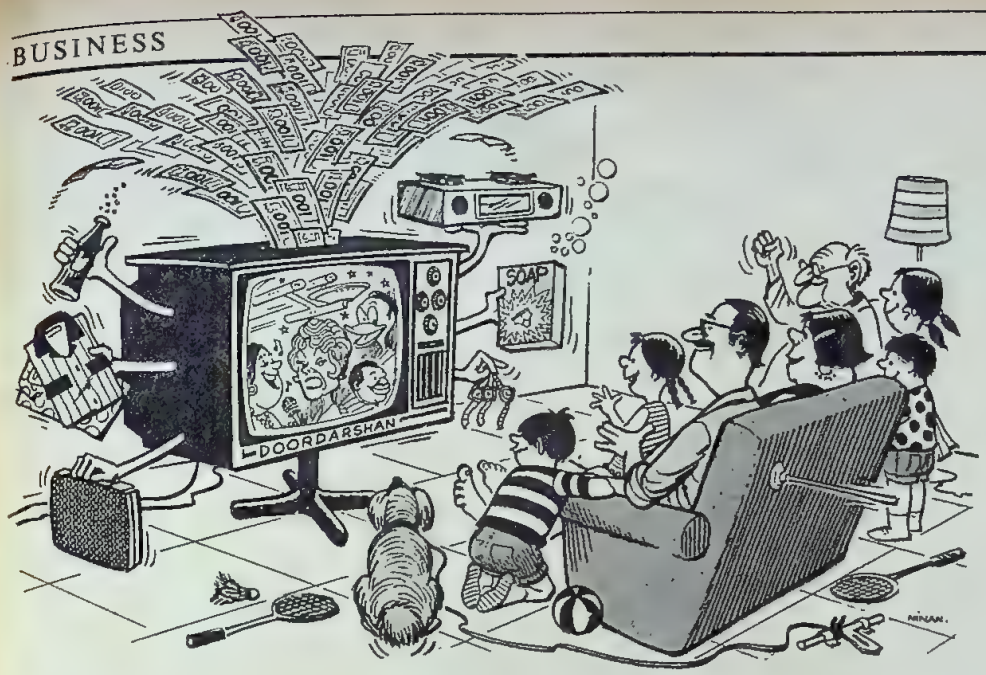
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DOORDARSHAN

A Sponsored Success

THE MEDIUM is the message—and a profitable one, apparently, as a growing number of corporate entities are beginning to discover. With Doordarshan having conceded that its own efforts at making non-film-based programmes have been less than a roaring success, sponsorship of shows by private companies has become the wave of the immediate future. In its wake, a host of programme makers are readying to produce television films for a market that has been thrown wide open.

Inderjit Singh, chief executive of Fusebase Pvt Ltd which has been sponsoring *Star Trek* in Delhi says: "We think that the 7 to 10 per cent increase in sales from April 1984 onwards, when we started sponsoring programmes, is the result of our advertising on television." Fusebase, which manufacturers stoves and home appliances, plans to step up its TV campaign budget from the current 30 per cent to 50 per cent of its total ad budget in 1984-85. Parle Exports is another company to climb onto the bandwagon. Says Managing Director Ramesh Chauhan: "We are sponsoring programmes in lieu of spots (which are cluttered). The advantage is that our ads stand out better."

Singh and Chauhan are not alone. The number of sponsored programmes is now 11 in Delhi as against two before July 1983, when the Government relaxed sponsorship guidelines. It invited advertisers to back or produce entertainment programmes in place of socially relevant shows. Thus the pre-relaxation period had *Sarb Sanjhi Gurbani* (sponsored by Texla TV), and *Chitrahaar* (initially Topaz, later S. Kumar). Post-July 1983 has seen *Show Time* (Reliance Textile Industries), *Diff'rent Strokes* (Pure Drinks), the ghazals programme (Modella), the Sunday movie (HMT, Nirma) and *The Lucy Show* (Nicky Tasha and Aristocrat Luggage), to name some.

Advertisers are becoming aware of the importance of a medium which every day enters between three million and four million homes, has an audience of 30 to 40 million and is set by 1984-end to cover 70 per cent of the population if the Government's TV coverage plans fructify on time. Doordarshan's leap-frogging revenue reflects the increasing ad commitment to the medium. Of the total expenditure on advertising on the country of Rs 280 crore in 1982, Rs 16 crore went into Doordarshan's kitty, says an Ogilvy, Benson & Mather issue of *Media Bulletin*. Doordarshan's revenue climbed to Rs 20 crore in 1983-84 (rates were revised in September 1983) and is expected to top Rs 25 crore in 1984-85 "if the present trend continues," says a Doordarshan official. Rates are likely to be jacked up again later in the year.

Close on the heels of the sponsorship upsurge, assorted private sector firms are discreetly probing the viability of producing films for television. The representative of a foreign hardware supplier claims that since September 1983, his company has received around 100 enquiries about equipment from sources as diverse as the Tatas, Birlas, Charanjit Singh of Pure Drinks, a newspaper group, Reliance Textiles Industries, movie moguls B.R. Chopra and L.V. Prasad, film stars like Shashi Kapoor and many one-man outfits. "But only four or five have followed through with firm orders," he says.

Foreign suppliers themselves have set up shop or strengthened their video film equipment divisions in India (Sony Orson, JVC-India, Philips and Bosch) to get in on the ground floor of what promises to be a boom.

Those jockeying for an inside track on television film production include Golden Tobacco boss Sanjay Dalmia, three advertising agencies and a host of small-timers. Dalmia's recently set up Delhi-based Independent Television Company (ITV) says that it has sent proposals to the Union Information & Broadcasting Ministry for a quiz serial, a soap opera, a health series and an election night analysis of poll returns. Only the first two have met with the Government's approval so far.

In Bombay, Mahesh and Shobha Doctor's Concept Marketing and Advertising has clinched a deal with the I&B Ministry to jointly produce a soap opera. The serial, to be called *Hum Log*, will initially run into 39 episodes, but might in the long run, be extended to 100, to be telecast twice a week from early July. Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA) and Lintas are both trying out for Hindustan Lever, a 26-part soap opera and a quiz serial which might go on the air around mid-July. To add to this flurry of activity, Doordarshan has also commissioned film producers like Satyajit Ray and Muzaffar Ali to produce 36 programmes, paying them Rs 1.5-2 lakh per half-hour of film.

Though there is no dearth of big plans to enter the commercial television scene, only a couple have actually fructified so far. One is the highly popular *Show Time* released by Nari Hira's Creative Unit and produced by Manju Singh of Network 7. Another is the ghazal programmes released for Modella by Concept and produced by Vijay Dhumale's Video Communication.

Dhumale is now working on a health programme which he will produce in collaboration with organisations like the Lions Club. Newtork 7, meanwhile, is working a number of projects—a weekly adventure serial for children, a serial for housewives, and a long-run satire of 15 minutes each.

Four factors are held responsible for the surge of interest:

▶ The acute famine in quality pro-

grammes to feed a hungry network. Though Doordarshan makes over 80 per cent of its own programmes, programme quality is appalling. Says a member of the P.C. Joshi working group on software, which submitted its report to the Government early this year, "Obviously there's no shortage of programmes as such but relevant programmes."

► Doordarshan's switch to the ¾ inch U-matic tape format after Asiad 1982, permitting poducers to use tape that is much cheaper than conventional film. Explains HTA Accounts Director Ambar Brahmachary: "The cost is lower and the speed higher in video. HTA, Delhi, made 18 video commercials in the last six months. That's a huge number because in a year we used to make that many conventional films."

► The Government's intention to set up a second channel, first in Delhi by the year end, and later in the other metropolises. According to the I&B Ministry, no formal financial sanctions have been obtained for it (it will fall under the Seventh Plan), but by cobbling together existing equipment at a cost of Rs 50 lakh, the Government hopes that 2-3 hour telecasts will begin in Delhi by 1984-end. "The channel won't be a wholly commercial channel. It will primarily be a local, metropolitan channel telecasting in the evening programmes on Delhi affairs, local news, sponsored imported programmes, and repeats of programmes screened on the first channel that might have been missed by viewers," explains an I&B Ministry official.

► Doordarshan's current rate structure. An I&B Ministry official claims: "The rate structure has been devised with a view to encouraging local programme production activity as two minutes of free commercial time is given, and telecast charges are only Rs 5,000 per kendra." A look at the rates bears out the claim. An advertiser who sponsors an imported programme pays Rs 2,625 per second of commercial time on the national network as against Rs 708 per second for locally produced programme, assuming that production costs are Rs 50,000.

Logically, therefore, the rates should send advertisers scurrying to back locally produced programmes. But many advertisers still prefer foreign programmes. Parle's Chauhan, for one, argues that "foreign programmes are better made, due to (the producer's) better experience, equipment and larger clientele".

The economics of import also lend an edge to foreign programmes. Nor do hurdles like import restrictions or licensing have to be crossed. Most people in the business privately affirm that film serials are imported illegally. Agents contact sponsors and jet off abroad to bring master tapes. Serials are also imported under Open General Licence (OGL) as educational films. Legal imports also take place once the sponsor gets Doordarshan approval of a serial sample. Doordarshan then, through the I&B Ministry, recommends to the Union Commerce Ministry that an import licence, foreign licence and foreign exchange



It is primarily Doordarshan's poverty of equipment that has forced it to take the easy way out with film-based programmes and imported comedies.

be approved. Says Ajay Prasad, the cherubic I&B Ministry mandarin who presides over the implementation of the Government's Rs 68 crore plan to expand TV coverage to 70 per cent of the population, "All foreign programmes except *Diff'rent Strokes* underwent this process. We've made sure that the sponsor had the legal rights to the programme in India." He confesses that he doesn't know how agents pay for programmes in foreign exchange and sell them for rupees but says that Doordarshan is unofficially going into the matter.

The rash of foreign serials on television has triggered off cries of a cultural invasion from the West. Their number on the national network has inched its way up. The P.C. Joshi Committee pointed out that foreign serials took up 10.3 per cent of TV time during May-July 1983. Though an I&B Ministry official says that at present "the content of foreign programmes in Doordarshan is about 3-4 per cent" that may be an understatement. Indian viewers have watched *The Lucy Show*, *Diff'rent Strokes*, *Sportlight*, the *Civilisation* series, *A Century of Surgeons*, to name a few and in the past *Yes Minister*, *To The Manor Born* and *Father, Dear Father*, besides the one-shot Oscar and Grammy Awards shows. More are likely to be telecast in the next four or five weeks: *Goodbye Mr Kent* and *Sorry*, both BBC productions, and *Odd Couple*, an American comedy.

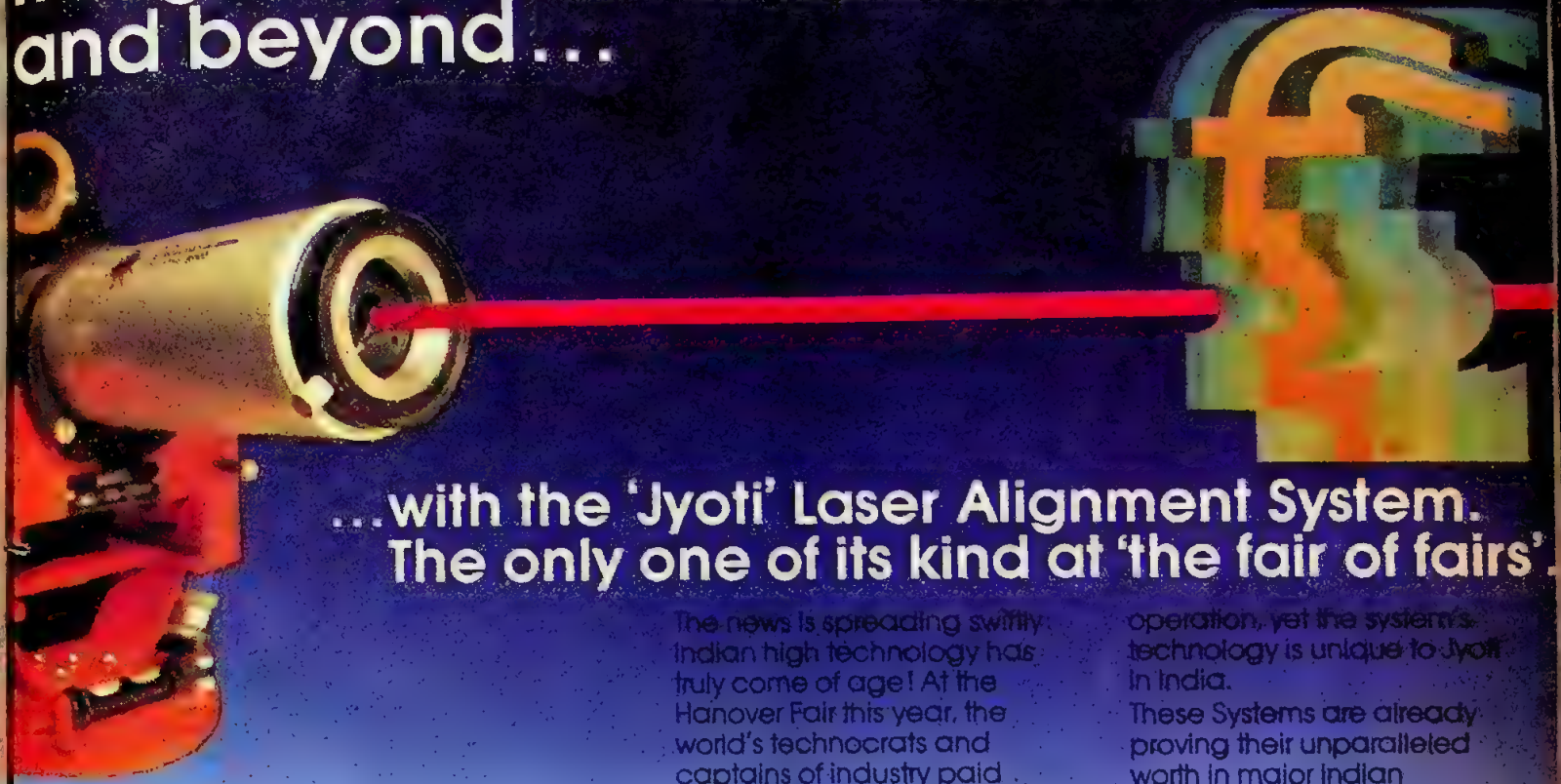
It is primarily Doordarshan's poverty of equipment that has forced it to take the easy way out with film-based programmes and imported comedies. It has too few full-fledged studios with three cameras, its low band U-matic ¾ inch system tape is not used in most countries, besides, it has a paucity of broadcasting staff and a crippling lack of creativity. Notes the Joshi Committee report: "A content analysis of Delhi Doordarshan's offerings, from March 25, 1983, to April 7, 1983, showed that feature films and film-related programmes occupied the largest single chunk of television time (21.1 per cent)." Though an I&B Ministry official says that "Doordarshan would not like to have a preponderance of film-based programmes", even today they take up about nine hours of the approximately 49 hours of telecast time a week (18.4 per cent). The "obscene gestures and scenes of hero-chasing-heroine-round-bushes" leads G.N.S. Raghavan, professor of development communication at Delhi's Indian Institute of Mass Communications, and a member of the Joshi Committee, to fulminate: "TV is a publicly subsidised source of entertainment for the urban rich. To purvey such entertainment at public expense is immoral."

But, despite the conjunction of favourable factors, it would be erroneous to infer that a software boom is imminent in the country. That will have to wait for two or three more years by which time equipment may be made domestically. Video film equipment today is generally imported. Import licences are granted on government clearance. They are difficult to get because Gujarat Communication & Electronics Ltd (GCEL), Baroda, and Bharat Electronics Ltd, both public sector undertakings, plan on making the equipment and the Government wants people to buy from them. Thus there is only a handful of full-fledged video studios in the country.

The upshot is that all producers are currently improvising in hired auditoriums, theatres and film studios, and paying exorbitant rentals for equipment. Dhumale claims that with the current facilities not more than five or six quality programmes can be produced in Bombay every week, and perhaps fewer than this in Delhi. The message is that imported serials and products of Bombay's dream machine will continue to rule the television waves for quite some months to come.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with bureau reports

Hanover, 1984: Indian technology speeds through the gateway of industrial Europe and beyond...



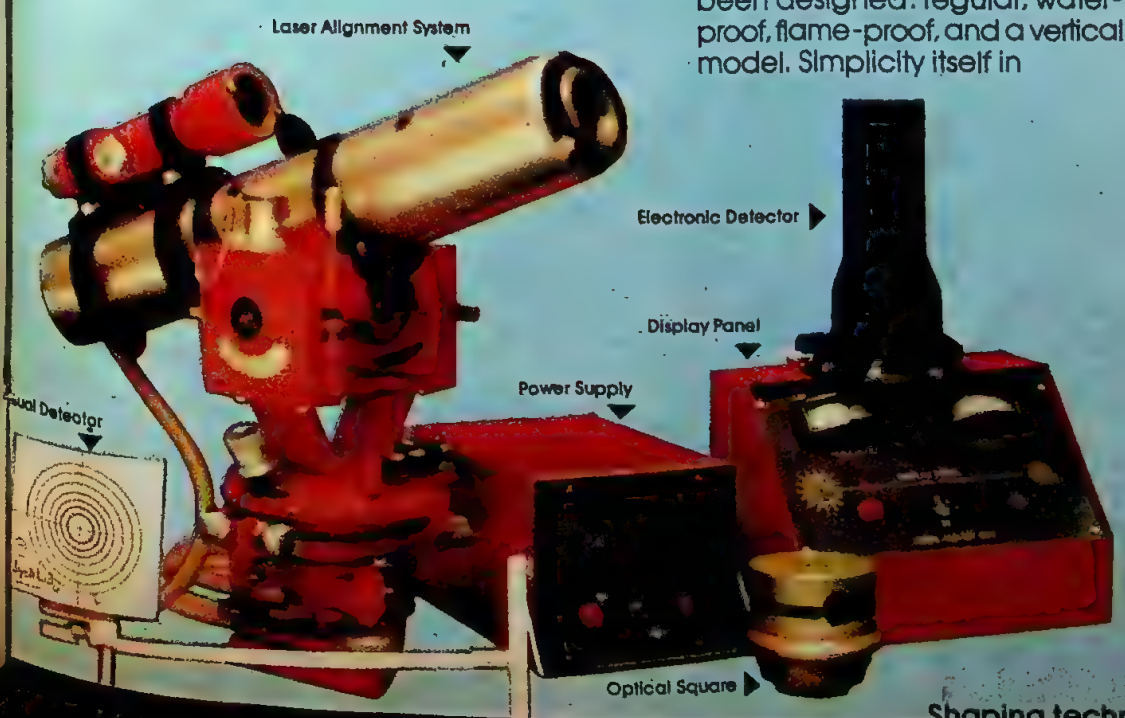
...with the 'Jyoti' Laser Alignment System. The only one of its kind at 'the fair of fairs'.

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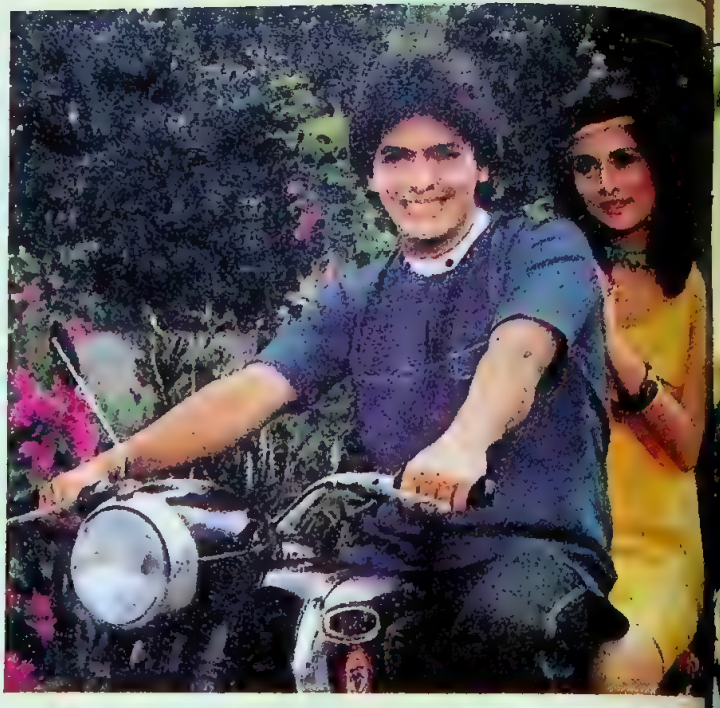


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BHARAT GOLD MINES

In the Dumps

TO THE trouble-ridden Bharat Gold Mines Ltd (BGML), the public sector undertaking that manages the Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) in Karnataka, the Union Government's decision last fortnight to pay 10 per cent more for the gold it buys from the company came as a shot in the arm, what with losses mounting to Rs. 5.49 crore last year, the biggest since it took over the mines in 1972.

KGF accounts for two-thirds of Indian gold production. BGML sells all the gold it produces (1.2 tonnes last year) to the Central Government. Under an unusual pricing formula, the Government used to pay the company the London Metal Exchange price plus 25 per cent. The Centre's decision pushes up the price differential to 35 per cent.

BGML had originally plugged for 50 per cent of the international price but even with 35 per cent it optimistically hopes to start turning the corner within the next two years. Admits P.D. Gupta, BGML's bespectacled chairman: "It's going to be an uphill task. We are working on mines that are a century old and the yield is steadily depleting."

Ironically, when world gold prices shot up in 1980, BGML for the first time showed profits and promptly predicted a "golden future" for itself. But with gold falling into a price trough over the past three years the company is back in the red and likely to remain there for a long time to come. Says Gupta: "Right now things are pretty bleak. The price crash has put the clock back on all our plans."

Conscious of its plight, BGML had shot off desperate proposals to the Centre. The company suggested that the Government sell the 20 tonnes of gold it had bought from BGML since 1972 at the Indian market price, usually 50 per cent higher than the world price, and pass on some of the proceeds of the sale to it. At the current domestic price of Rs 1,990 for 10 gm the Centre's gold stock is worth Rs 414 crore. The Finance Ministry shot down the idea in view of the 1978 Janata government gold auction experience and because it felt that gold is a socially undesirable form of investment.

BGML also pleaded that the Government pay it the Indian market price, citing the example of Hutti Gold Mines Ltd (HGML), a Karnataka Government company that is permitted to sell gold to industrial users at the domestic price.





A mine shaft at the Kolar Gold Fields (top) and Chairman Gupta: rash predictions

HGML accounts for a third of India's gold production and has been in the black for the last three years. Last year it announced a profit of Rs 1.7 crore. But the Centre feels that enough gold is reaching the Indian market via HGML and that its BGML gold pricing policy is fair.

The Government's panacea for BGML is unlikely to prevent it from heading for sick bay. The gold yield for every tonne of ore milled from the mines has indeed been steadily dropping, from 5.71 gm per tonne of ore in 1977 to an uneconomical 3.47 gm last year. Thus, although it mines an average of 3.63 lakh tonnes of ore annually, BGML's gold output has tumbled dramatically. In 1980 when international gold prices rose to dizzy heights, Gupta rashly predicted that BGML's gold production of 1,649 kg would double within the next five years. Instead it fell even further and last year touched a low of 1, 185 kg.

To pare costs the board decided not to add to the present worker strength of 12,778. In 1980 it added on 1,000 workers but last year when it tried to retrench around 400 of them they went to court and won the case.

BGML is up against other problems. KGF now gets its 20 mw of power from the Shivasamudram power station, built in 1902, at the obsolete 25 cycle frequency. Shivasamudram power was being supplied exclusively to KGF. But the state Government finds it more economical to divert the waters at the reservoir which feeds the Shivasamudram generators for irrigation. The cost of installing converters is a hefty Rs 27 crore and BGML has been dragging its feet on it. But the Karnataka Government has now told it to convert to the normal 50 cycle frequency by year-end or have its power supply cut. BGML told the state Government that its decision would render 13,000 people jobless. But the Government stuck to its guns. BGML has now prepared a feasibility report on installing converters. The Centre may lend BGML the money for the converters. But BGML will have more red ink on its ledgers.

Despite these setbacks Gupta was still talking about a bright future for gold. Last month BGML released an ambitious corporate plan that promised to double gold production by 1990. BGML is banking on increasing output at the existing KGF mines by modernising mining techniques. It hopes also to get about 300 kg of gold from the Yeppamana mines at the Ramagiry gold fields, abandoned in 1927 but reopened by BGML at a cost of Rs 5.7 crore after it found that it could still economically mine gold. Unlike at KGF where gold has to be extracted from shafts as deep as 2 km, gold is found at Yeppamana at 50 to 100 m depths. Hence production costs are much less than at KGF. BGML hopes that the profits it earns from mining Yeppamana gold will partly offset the losses at KGF. But experts point out that the carbon column technique to be used at Yeppamana is unproven and that therefore the actual yield might be much less than anticipated.

BGML also has plans to extract gold from the 20 lakh tonnes of mine ore tailings dumped in and around KGF. These dumps contain about 0.5 gm of gold per tonne. By using the heap leaching technique BGML plans to extract 500 kg of gold annually from 1989 at an investment of Rs 1.02 crore. But experts argue that unless the technique is perfected it may not be economical to extract the gold. Says one expert: "Both the Yeppamana technique of extracting gold as well as the heap leaching technique are still untested. Unless they are proven beyond doubt we shouldn't be pumping money into them and then repenting at leisure." For BGML, all that glitters is certainly not gold.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Kolar Gold Fields

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION IN PUNJAB HAS INCREASED

Factory working round the clock to meet the booming market requirements.



EXTRI

From Tribune Reporter

AMRITSAR, Feb 22
Eleven persons were
in four violent inciden
this district and one
dent each in Gurdaspur
Hoshiarpur districts to
Armed men struck ea
this morning in the Pu
ghar area killing one pe
son and seriously injurin
two others in two shooting
incidents which forced the
authorities to withdraw
the eight-hour relaxation
of the curfew in the strife-
torn city.

(According to P.T.I., the Punjab and Haryana Governments are in touch with the Army authorities.)

The deceased was Mr Asho
Kumar (22), son of the bloc
Congress (I) Vice-President, M

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Curfew extended

— Correspondent

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t: Bandh and its aftermath

Temple and Durgiana Mandir, the G.T. Road and parts of Civil lines.

At Ludhiana the curfew was ended till 2 p.m. tomorrow. It will be relaxed for an hour tomorrow from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. to enable the people in curfew-

extended

AMBU

has been admitted to a hospi
and is "out of danger".

Mr Ajit Singh said the
nades were hurled at the con
gent when it was returning to
headquarters at Bhami village
Batala Subdivision after duty
Harchowal.

Three of the four gre
thrown exploded. These were
from an old brick-kiln
Bhanwari,

Yes ! Industrial production in Punjab is sky rocketing at a tremendous pace. This is news, no one ever tells you about. Look at the amazing figures . . . During 1982-83 industrial production was to the tune of Rs. 2928 crores. But by 1983-84 it had risen to Rs. 3130 crores, a rise of over Rs. 200 crores.

Tax collection has also touched new heights. Sales Tax collection between April '83 to January '84 went upto Rs. 20,664 lakhs from Rs. 18,285 lakhs collected during April '82 to January '83.

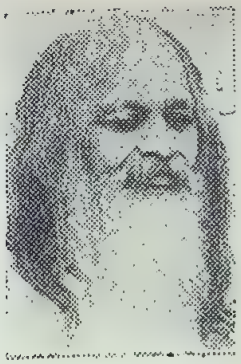
Power availability has gone up by more than 4000 lakh units during 1983-84 as compared to 1982-83. Adding fresh impetus to the industrial activity, 16 large units and over 10,000 small units have come up, providing employment to more than five lakh.

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EXPORT

Indigenous Craft

IF MANMOHAN Desai got his hands on it, Amitabh Bachchan would soon be hurtling down a stretch of swamp near Bombay, shooting down a couple of hundred thugs bent upon wresting Rekha from him, coasting from swamp to beach to national highway without so much as batting an eyelid. For the moment, however, 'it' is cruising cautiously along the river near Delhi, being put through its paces. The first Indian-made hovercraft, a 12-ft long two-seater affair in gleaming white fibreglass is ready for lift-off.

The hovercraft is the fruit of a 100 per cent export tie-up between the Scientific Instrument Co Ltd (sico) of Allahabad—which makes laboratory instruments such as calorimeter—and Neoteric USA Inc of Terre Haute, Indiana. The Indian company plans to build 10 of the craft every month at its plant at Ghaziabad, 20 km from Delhi, from plans and specifications provided by Neoteric. All are slated for the United States, where Neoteric will sell them for a price which is expected to be nearly $10,000 (Rs 1.10 lakh).

"The arrangement makes sense for both of us," says U.D. Mishra, chief of operations, hovercraft division, sico, who has been associated with the project since its inception three years ago. "We get the know-how and the experience in a field which offers great possibilities in India. They get their machine built for a tenth of what it would have cost in the US."

The sico-Neoteric arrangement began four years ago when sico expressed its desire to collaborate with the small American firm in hovercraft construction. For its part Neoteric was only too pleased to accept—the US is not the most economical of places for a small manufacturer thinking in terms of hundreds, rather than thousands of machines. By 1983, sico had manufactured the parts for six hovercraft, which were shipped to the US and assembled there. Then Mishra and his team began work on an Indian built model in November 1983 and completed it in February this year.

In appearance, the hovercraft—known as the Lemere in the US—is like a racing car with a rakish front, suddenly rising to the hump of a ventilated engine housing behind the seats. A 5-horsepower engine tucked underneath a cowling in the front generates the air cushion which lifts the hull—it has all the floating characteristics of a boat—9 inches above the surface. A 55-horsepower engine behind provides the thrust—channelised through vanes which are controlled by means of a simple joystick in the cockpit—which can drive the machine at 60 kmph over, as the American brochure for the Lemere puts it laconically, "water swamp ice snow desert mud sand grass". It can also pull a trailer, but is essentially a recreation vehicle.

The Americans appear to be very satisfied with the product. Says Robert K. Wilson, Neoteric's technical director, who is supervising production in Ghaziabad: "It's a bit too early to comment on Indian workmanship but so far things have turned out well." The hovercraft still lacks finishing touches such as an instrument panel and an integrated control system to replace the rather rudimentary throttles placed in the cockpit.

To describe the streamlined machine now resting on sico's shop floor as a triumph for Indian technology would be going too far. For one, Neoteric has provided all the know-how and the specifications. For another, crucial features such as the neoprene skirting for the air bag, the 5-horsepower Briggs & Stratton motor which generates the air cushion and the compact but muscled 55-horsepower Fuji motor which provides the thrust are all imported. "Where could we have got a motor like this in India, with four times the power of an Ambassador's but only half its size?" comments Mishra.

The new hovercraft: ready for lift-off



The company is concentrating on smoothing out the production process with better fibreglass moulds—the moulds used for the first one were wooden—and faster assembly. The present factory shed is seen to be too small for an operation which is supposed to produce one finished machine every three days. "We are also trying to reduce the import content," says Mishra although it is difficult to see how this can be done with so many key components imported. There are no plans yet to market the craft in India. Manmohan Desai will have to wait.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

THE MARKETS

Biding Time

THE SHARE markets, they say, generally move against the mercury—they have certainly been doing so for the past two months, although mercury may not be the only reason for the downslide—and now that the worst of the summer is over, one should expect the stocks to edge upwards. In fact, a slight upward movement was noticed towards the end of last month, but it was on a selective basis and only a few shares, not all of them blue chips, were affected. The reasons vary from scrip to scrip.—Associated Cement, for instance, gained substantially following rumours that a higher price for levy cement was about to be announced. Other cement shares picked up too, and so did some fertiliser shares in sympathy. Tata Steel is also apparently expecting some good news from New Delhi, possibly in the form of price hikes for certain categories of steel, and the scrip has perked up despite reports that the company did not do well last year. East India Hotels has gained appreciably over the fortnight and so has Larsen & Toubro. Most other shares are marking time, waiting for a break in the clouds that skirt the economic landscape.

Actally, it is not all that dismal. A record foodgrain crop is in the bag and with the monsoon more or less on time another similar crop is expected this year. The harvest hasn't had much of an effect on other sectors: industrial growth, for instance, is languishing and did not even touch 5 per cent during the year ended April 1984. But there is always a lag of a few months, sometimes even a year, in such cases, and if the past trends are any guide, industrial production should pick up in the current year (1984-85), some Udyog Bhavan crystal-gazers being so

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Ah! TAJ



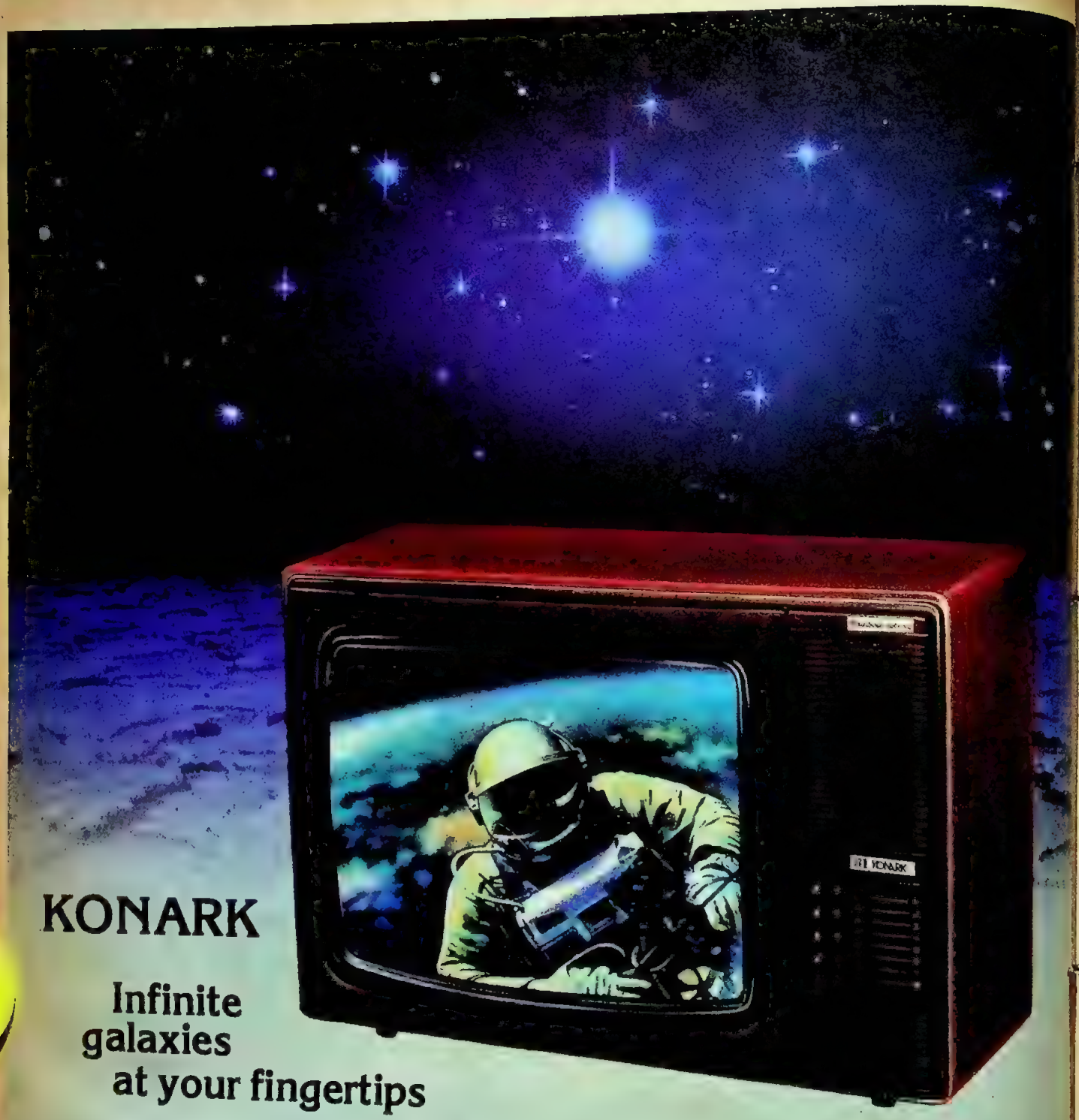
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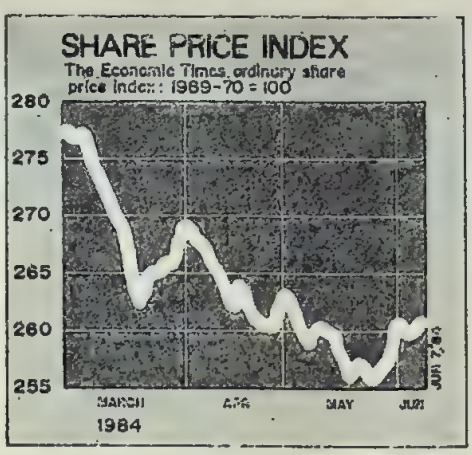
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	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 1.6.84	Change on fortnight
Ambalal Sarabhai	14.75	11.50	11.50	nil
Asea	58.00	48.00	53.00	1.00 +
Ashok Leyland	37.50	29.50	29.75	0.25 +
Associated Cement	331.50	298.50	311.50	13.00 +
Atlas Copco	43.00	32.75	33.00	0.25 +
Ballarpur	53.30	46.20	46.50	nil
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	261.00	4.00 +
BASF	49.00	38.50	38.50	1.00 –
Bata India	48.35	33.30	37.40	0.40 +
Bharat Commerce	20.65	15.90	16.00	0.10 +
Birla Jute	62.50	54.20	54.40	1.30 +
Blow Plast	48.50	41.00	41.50	0.25 +
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	33.00	1.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	63.50	66.50	0.50 +
Boots	67.00	45.00	59.00	2.50 –
Britannia Industries	40.60	33.60	33.60	1.40 –
Brooke Bond	38.50	34.10	35.60	0.20 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	800.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	48.00	1.00 +
Coates of India	30.87	26.50	28.00	0.50 –
Colgate	114.00	100.00	112.50	0.50 +
Cynamid	45.50	32.00	37.00	5.00 +
DCM	76.12	47.37	52.37	5.25 –
Dunlop	27.60	25.25	26.20	0.20 +
East India Hotels	37.25	29.00	37.25	4.00 +
Elecon	46.00	39.00	46.00	2.50 +
Escorts	76.00	52.75	66.12	0.38 –
Food Specialities	80.00	69.00	70.00	2.00 –
Gen Carbon	25.00	16.00	17.25	1.25 +
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	21.00	21.10	0.10 +
Gwalior Rayon	67.75	49.00	64.00	0.75 +
Herdillia Chemicals	25.00	20.50	20.50	0.75 –
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	44.00	44.65	1.90 –
Hindustan Cocoa	53.00	31.00	51.00	0.50 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	47.50	nil
Hindustan Motors	42.64	40.40	42.04	0.64 +
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.10	19.40	0.35 –
Indian Cable	24.10	20.40	22.40	0.10 –
Indian Explosives	28.00	25.00	25.40	0.10 –
Indian Organic	34.50	31.00	34.50	2.25 +
Indian Oxygen	38.25	34.80	35.40	nil
Indian Rayon	75.50	64.50	67.00	2.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	47.50	40.10	40.10	0.40 –
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	43.00	1.00 +
Kesoram Cotton	61.50	47.85	48.00	1.50 –
Kinetic Engineering	137.00	113.00	137.00	8.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	460.00	407.50	455.00	32.50 +
Kothari (Madras)	26.50	22.00	24.50	2.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	78.50	65.00	71.00	3.25 +
Lipton	33.80	24.50	26.70	1.20 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	67.50	52.00	66.50	2.50 +
Mangalam Cement	31.00	20.00	20.25	0.25 –
Modi Rubber	30.31	24.50	27.62	1.12 +
Motor Industries	252.50	212.50	212.50	2.50 –
National Organic	203.25	176.50	178.75	3.75 –
Nirlon	37.00	32.00	35.75	0.50 +
Otis Elevator	59.00	54.00	56.00	0.50 –
Premier Automobiles	283.00	248.00	271.50	13.50 +
Ranbaxy	55.00	41.00	42.50	1.50 –
Reliance	123.00	110.00	114.00	0.50 +
Richardson Hindustan	71.50	56.00	59.00	3.00 +
Shriram Fibres	34.50	30.47	33.12	0.38 –
Siemens	47.50	43.00	43.00	1.00 –
SPIC	33.75	28.06	31.62	3.37 +
Straw Products	67.00	43.75	43.75	1.75 –
Tata Chemicals	58.00	53.25	53.25	0.25 –
Tata Steel	288.00	245.50	282.50	8.50 +
Telco	428.00	398.00	408.00	7.00 +
Termaco	58.40	50.85	51.40	0.40 +
Union Carbide	28.80	24.60	25.00	0.20 –
Usha Martin Black	22.50	19.50	20.25	0.75 +
Voltas	395.00	335.00	340.00	2.00 +
Wimco	43.50	28.50	36.00	3.00 +
20th Century Leasing	49.00	32.00	34.00	0.35 –
Unit Trust	14.36	13.65	14.36	0.05 +



bold as to forecast a growth rate of 8 per cent. This would be double the average for last two years and should provide a shot in the arm for the stock-market.

What probably worries the marketeers is the depressing situation on the other front — the political one — and the fact that no end seems to be in sight. The troubles in Bombay are said to have set back industry there at least a month, though Bombay is known for taking such things in its stride, and the troubles in Punjab have already cast a gloom on trade and industry there. Some Punjab-based companies are worried about the immediate future and it is only a matter of time before their fears find echo elsewhere. Things should sort themselves, however, after the rains, one way or the other. Most people believe that with elections round the corner, the ruling party just can't afford to let things drift anymore and will soon come up with a formula that might ease things a bit.

One can't really blame people for putting their money into debentures and similar sure-fire schemes rather than take a risk by putting it into shares. Debentures have turned out to be such a big success story that the companies don't know what to do with the bonanza on their hands. Tata Steel has reportedly collected more than Rs 75 crore, which is quite a draft on the tight savings market. Other debentures are in the pipeline, including a Rs 3 crore issue from Ranbaxy and a much bigger issue from Larsen & Toubro, and, of course, Reliance. Some convertible debenture issues are also on the anvil. With so much money being pumped out of the market, equities will be forced to fend for themselves, which is one reason why the equity market is so moribund. But you can't take anything for granted where the stock-market is concerned, things should start humming again in Dalal Street and elsewhere before you can say 'bulls and bears'.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES

June 1, 1984

	LATEST	Change on month
ET Commodity Price Index*	297.5	12.5 +
Chemicals	342.5	4.7 +
Industrial Fibres	216.3	1.0 +
Metals	392.5	0.5 +
Gold, standard Rs per 10 gm	1985.00	10.00 –
Silver, .999 Rs per kg	3510.00	5.00 –

SHARES

June 1, 1984

ET Share Price Index*	260.7	2.7 –
Cement	192.8	3.0 +
Chemicals	221.9	3.8 +
Engineering	449.	6.2 –
Fertilisers	253.5	9.1 +
Paper	553.8	6.6 –
Rubber Goods	177.0	nil

MONEY

May 4, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.5%	nil
Call Money Rate, Bombay	9.48%	0.52% –
Money Supply		1.7%
Bank Deposits		0.8%
Foreign Exchange Assets		5.7% –

* Index—1969–70 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY UNIT		TT selling rates Rs	TT buying rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.9933	9.8764
Austria	Schilling	100	59.1019	58.4463
Bahrain	Dinar	1	29.4439	29.2398
Bangladesh	Taka	100	44.2124	43.9068
Canada	Dollar	1	8.5221	8.4316
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1237	1.1167
Egypt	Pound	1	13.3579	13.2553
France	Franc	1	1.3486	1.3337
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.4125	1.3980
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1007	1.0930
Iran	Rial	100	12.4735	12.3679
Italy	Lira	100	0.6589	0.6526
Japan	Yen	100	4.8141	4.7698
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7842	0.7787
Kuwait	Dinar	1	37.4803	37.2005
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8029	4.7384
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8484	0.8348
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6886	0.6837
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.8772	3.8386
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8043	0.7987
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.2767	5.2188
Spain	Peseta	100	7.2148	7.1498
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4422	0.4391
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3911	1.3758
Switzerland	France	1	4.9734	4.9208
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.8865	0.8803
Thailand	Baht	100	48.2338	47.8130
UK	Pound	1	15.4847	15.3480
USA	Dollar	1	11.0800	10.9450
UAE	Dirham	1	3.0177	2.9967
USSR	Rouble	1	13.7589	13.6836
W Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.1480	4.1048

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 5th June 1984.

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Trouble in Paradise

RELAX. You're Our Pleasure," says the hoarding outside the Tourist Reception Centre in Srinagar, welcoming new arrivals to the cooler climes of Kashmir. But the unfortunate irony is that it is the reception staff inside who are relaxing behind gleaming new counters for want of customers. For two years in a row, nothing has hit the tourism industry in Kashmir harder than the deteriorating political climate at home and in neighbouring Punjab. Last summer, it was the state elections marked by sporadic bursts of violence that sent tourists rushing home; this year the worsening Punjab situation has reduced the number of overland travellers to Kashmir by at least another 30 per cent.

Although exact estimates are difficult to obtain mid-season, the fact remains that the maximum number of tourists recorded in Kashmir—about 650,000 in 1982—will be impossible to repeat this year. Some think that the figure may be easily halved, causing a body-blow to the state's biggest industry with a total income, direct and indirect, of Rs 281 crore and involving over half the state's labour force. On the surface things may not look all that bad: the four flights daily to Srinagar from Delhi and Bombay arrive packed and are often supplemented by additional services; and seasonal holiday-makers are to be seen thronging the main streets of Srinagar and popular resorts like Gulmarg or Pahalgam. But closer scrutiny confirms how hard the tourism business has been hit, at all levels of the market. Though fully booked flights to Srinagar suggest that upmarket tourism has been less affected, a random check of known hotels reveals otherwise.

Visitors checking into Srinagar's well-known Oberoi Palace Hotel last week were shown a choice of three available kinds of rooms—otherwise impossible in the month of June—and Hotel Broadway claimed that they had lost two major bookings for conferences in one week owing to exaggerated media reports of political trouble in Kashmir. Occupancy was down by 20 per cent in the best hotels for corresponding summer months in 1982; and medium to lower priced hotels and boarding houses felt the pinch harder owing to a substantial reduction in passengers travelling up by road or train. "The situation in Punjab has become the major deterrent," says Hindal Tyabji, commissioner, tourism, in the Jammu & Kashmir Government, adding that one reason also why the situation appeared so depressing was because of the increased hotel capacity in Srinagar in the last couple of years. Mohiuddin Shah, tourism director for the state, admits that the tourist graph began to register a downward trend in 1982, probably owing to the political uncertainty in the state but the decrease for that year was a marginal 6 per cent; in 1983, however, the number of visitors registered a further downfall of 30.15 per cent and this year may be the worst ever. Although pilgrim traffic (to Amarnath and Vaishno Devi) has remained constant, the shortfall is all the more glaring in the face of a steady rise in bed capacity, averaging over 2 per cent annually since 1981 when the number of beds recorded was as much as 25,268.

"Frankly, we only came because we got plane bookings easily," said Bombay businessman Kewal Varshney who was parked with his family in a houseboat on the Dal Lake. As regular summer visitors to Kashmir, he said he knew of "dozens of families who refused to come this year". Houseboat owners, numbering about 800 in Srinagar, once the star beneficiaries of the annual tourist boom, are today woefully down on their luck. Even Srinagar's best-known houseboat owner, G.N. Butt of Butt's Clermont Houseboats who owns a chain of super-deluxe boats moored along an exquisite private garden on the tranquil shores of the Upper Dal, admits that potential customers now constantly write to ask, "Are things normal? Is Kashmir safe?"

Cheaper boats, categorised by the tourism department in grades C,D and E, are worse off: normally relying on low market service and quick turnover, their owners can be heard clamouring for customers all day long in the Houseboat Owners' Association shed opposite the Tourist Reception Centre. "I'm losing at the rate of 50 paise in every rupee earned this summer," says Ghulam Mohammad, owner of the 'Ark Royal', parked cheek-

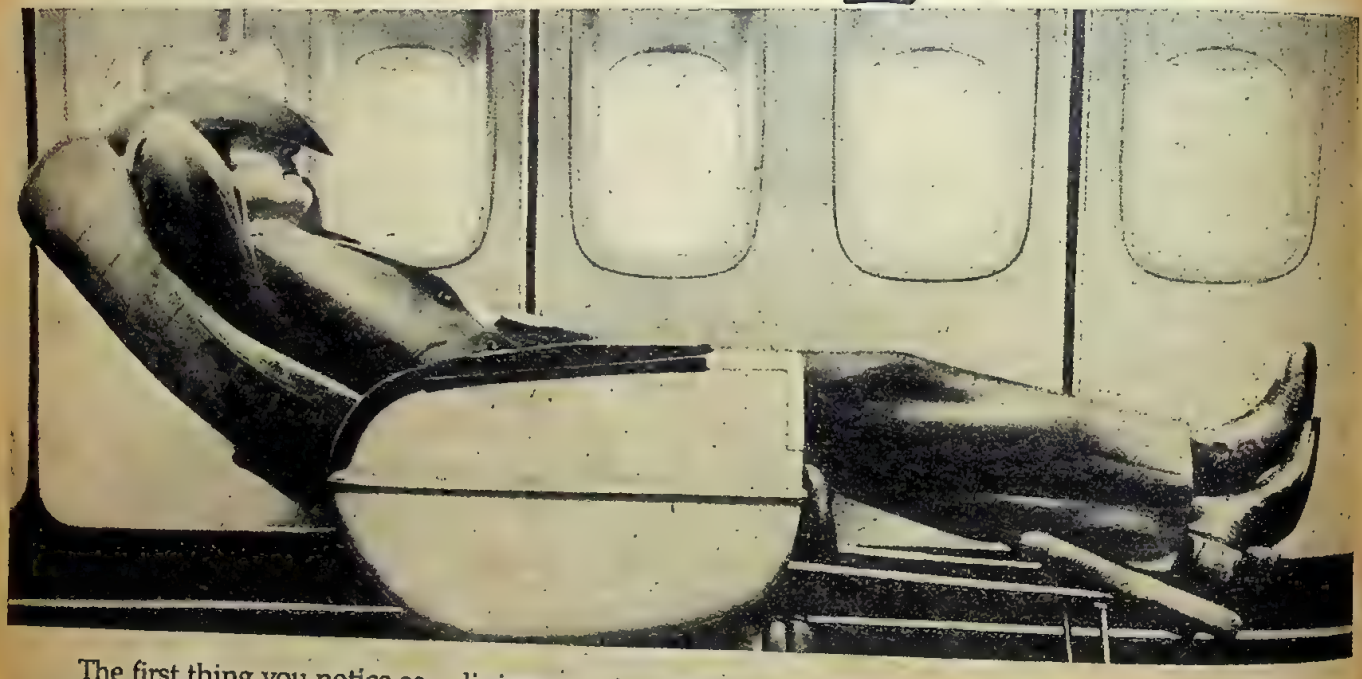
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Shikaras waiting for customers; and the deserted Tourist Reception Centre at Srinagar: dismal picture

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by-jowl with a few dozen other boats along Chinarbagh. Adds Siddiq, owner of 'Gulzar': "Things are so bad this year, we'll starve if they continue like this." Abdul Khaliq of 'Venus' who offers board and lodge at the astonishingly cut-throat rate of Rs 40 a day for two, says that he still can't find enough business. "Another summer like this and I'll have no choice but to sell the boat."

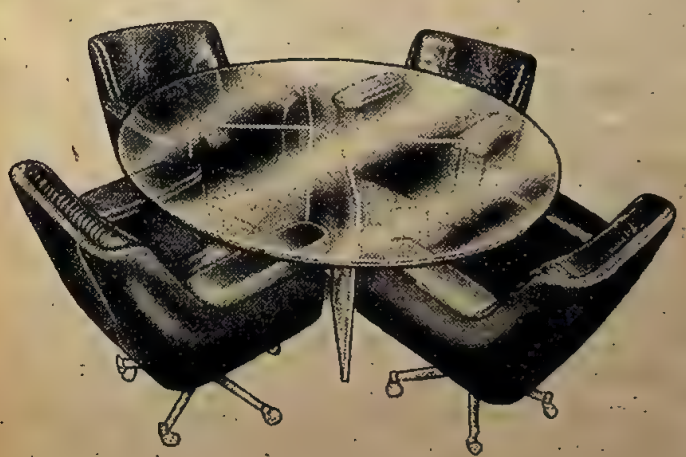
AS SERIOUSLY affected as the houseboats is the valley's sprawling handicrafts industry that produces anything from carpets and woollen shawls to traditional papier mache goods and walnut furniture. While the bigger export-oriented industries such as carpets aren't as badly affected, it is the hundreds of small shopkeepers that normally do brisk business in touristy bric-a-brac who have no customers this year. Says Ali Mohammed, proprietor of a papier mache goods store called "Shining Roses" on the road to Nagin Lake: "What do you expect when Nagin Lake is empty of tourists? I'm down to zero per cent business. It's difficult for me to pay rent." Big dealers in carpets, embroideries and rugs are as fearful of the future. Already regular clients aren't too enthusiastic about coming up; they are even less keen about having their goods transported through Punjab. "There's always a fear that given the total collapse of law and order in Punjab your goods may disappear somewhere on the highway and never reach their destination," says a well-known Kashmiri carpet manufacturer.

The state Government's Tourism Department is trying their best to stem the depression and mobilise tourist activity. Other than investing a massive Rs 8.44 crore in the recently-completed Sher-e-Kashmir Convention Centre at the poplar ringed edge of the Dal Lake, they are pumping money into upgrading existing tourist accommodation such as the 57 tourist huts, one residential club, tourist bungalow and four dormitories in Pahalgam. The refurbishing programme for this alone has cost between Rs 50 and Rs 60 lakh. Intensive tourist promotion has been undertaken through advertising and publicity, the budget for which has doubled to about Rs 50 lakh this year. Regular "holiday planners", lavish colour advertising in the print media, plus posters, placards, hoardings and a new guidebook to Kashmir are all part of the new effort, says Mohiuddin Shah, the tourism director.

Still, the most recent breakdown of figures available for tourists travelling to Kashmir by rail and road transport presents a dismal picture: the combined number has plummeted from 23,363 in the month of April, 1983, to 17,293 in April this year. No amount of publicity and promotion can compensate for the prevailing hazards of travelling through Punjab. Addressing a specially convened conference of the powerful Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI) in Srinagar last week, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, deeply troubled by the mounting pressures on him and his Government, singled out the Punjab situation as the most serious factor in destabilising Kashmir's tourism industry. Said he: "Everything has to come to Kashmir via Punjab; we have no other road, except taking a much longer route through Himachal Pradesh. Peace in Punjab is essential for Kashmir and me. If it weren't for conferences like these, the tourism industry would be in shambles. The famous houseboats and shikaras of Kashmir would be starved into oblivion."

—SUNIL SETHI in Srinagar

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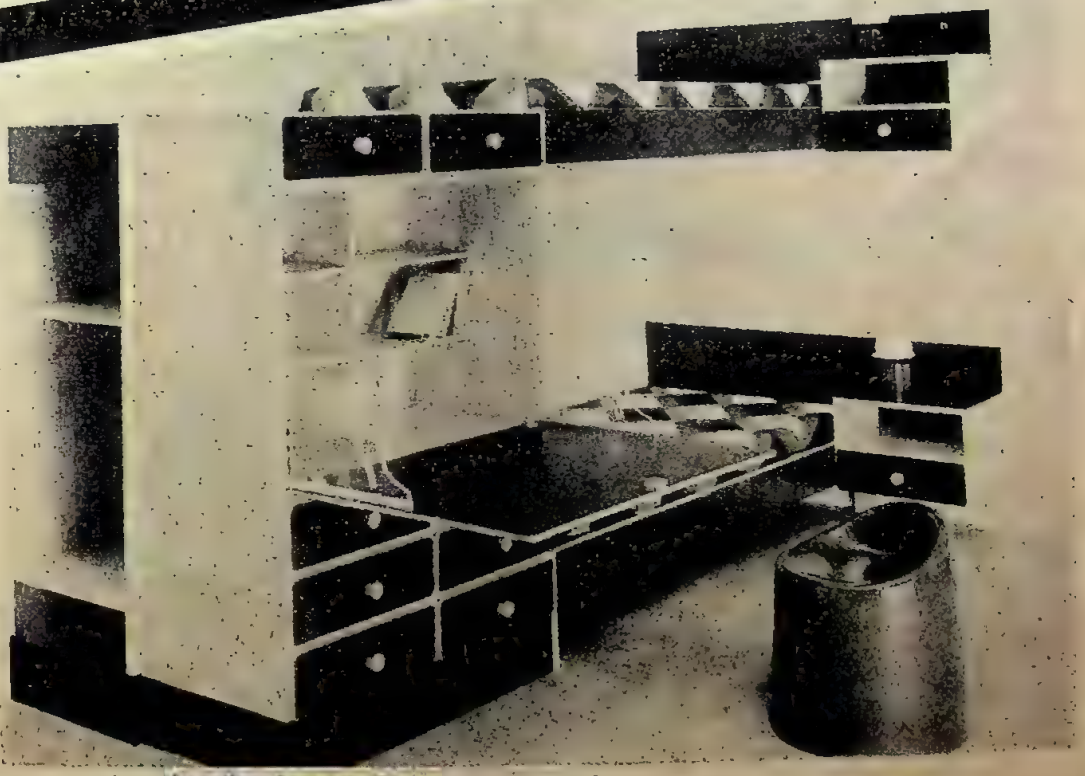
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Mirage-2000 with its armament at the Paris Air Show

IAF

The Mirage Minuet

THE MIRAGE is no longer a mirage. Last fortnight, in the famous wine country of Bordeaux in the south of France, the first fully assembled Mirage-2000 built for the Indian Air Force (IAF) glided off the assembly line at Dassault-Bregeut's sprawling plant at Marignac. The sleek, delta-winged fighter will undergo technical and avionic trials before being formally handed over in mid-September to IAF pilots currently training with the French Air Force's first Mirage-2000 fighter squadron. The first Mirage will be ferried across to Indian soil early next year for induction into the country's ballooning fighter aircraft inventory.

Last fortnight's champagne uncorked at Marignac was also for the benefit of Air Marshal Dilbagh Singh, IAF chief who had been invited to France for the occasion, albeit indirectly. In fact, the unveiling of the IAF Mirage at Marignac was underscored by two rather significant factors. One was that the announcement came from Dassault-Bregeut who flew down a senior public relations official to New Delhi specifically to break the good news. The second was that Dilbagh Singh had been invited to France by his counterpart in the French Air Force and the timing of his visit with the unveiling was hardly a coincidence. The French Government has majority control of Dassault and it would be safe to assume that Singh's invitation was tied in to the event at Marignac. Singh was also privileged to fly in one of the Mirage-2000s and according to French officials pronounced himself "quite satisfied".

But the key question is whether the Indian Government holds similar views. There was additional significance in the fact that Dassault found it necessary to fly down a spokesman to New Delhi. When the original Mirage deal was signed, the 'Intention to Proceed' contract was for an initial order of 40 aircraft for outright purchase in fly-away condition and an option to produce another 110 Mirages in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Bangalore, for which Dassault was agreeable to provide a total technology transfer. The deadline for that option, significantly enough, expires on June 30 and so far the Indian Government has given no indication that it will sign the second part of the contract. Defence Ministry officials remained tight-lipped about the production element of the deal except to say that no final decision had been taken yet. Mirage spokesmen say there are "positive signs" that the Indian Government will take up the option but that they are clearly worried is evident by the events of last fortnight.

Clearly, they have good reason to be perturbed. In financial terms, the Indian option offers Dassault the biggest-ever contract for the Mirage, even bigger than that of the French Air Force. So far, only Abu Dhabi, Egypt, Peru, India and the French Air Force have contracted for the Mirage-2000 and the Indian option will obviously give the programme a major financial boost.

But Dassault's worry extends beyond mere financial considerations. It is more rooted in the nature of the competition that has forced the Indian Government to review the second part of the Mirage contract; namely, the Soviet Union. Or, to be more specific, the MiG-29. The first sign that an attempt to scuttle the Mirage-2000 production programme was being made came when the Soviets offered India the MiG-29 the latest in their inventory (it is meant to enter Soviet operational service in 1985), during Defence Minister R. Venkatraman's visit to Moscow last August. The offer was repeated during Soviet Defence Minister Marshal Dmitri Ustinov's visit to New Delhi a few months later.

There have been other pointers in plenty. Shortly after his return from Moscow, Venkatraman stated in Parliament that India was going to select a "futuristic aircraft to meet the challenge posed by

the presence of the F-16 in a neighbouring country". The inference was clearly with regard to the MiG-29. Since then, Defence Ministry spokesmen have gone out of their way to sing the praises of the MiG-29, particularly its superiority over the F-16. A team of IAF pilots have already visited the Soviet Union for test flying the aircraft and reportedly returned enamoured of the aircraft's versatility. However, very little is actually known about the aircraft's actual performance and characteristics. It is undoubtedly a major improvement on previous Soviet fighters.

In March, 1983, the US Department of Defence published a document on Soviet military power which described the MiG-29 as a twin-engined aircraft with improved range, thrust-to-weight ratio and manoeuvrability that represented a "concerted effort by the Soviet Union to close the technological gap with the West". The document describes the MiG-29 as a supersonic all weather counter-air fighter with lookdown-shootdown weapon systems and beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles.

According to the latest edition of *Jane*'s, the MiG-29 is likely to have a true dual-role air combat/attack capability similar to the F-16 and F-18. However, there are doubts regarding claims that the aircraft is capable of speeds up to Mach 2.8 since it is made of conventional materials that would be unable to withstand the kinetic heating associated with that performance. But the bottom line in the MiG-29 offer, and one that the Defence Ministry will no doubt take undue consideration of, is the inevitable cost factor. According to sources, the MiG-29 is being offered to India with a price-tag of slightly under Rs 5 crore per aircraft which is about half the cost of the Mirage-2000. The obvious intention is to phase out the production of the MiG-21 Bis, the backbone of the IAF strike force, in time to switch over to the MiG-29 production project. The MiG-21 was originally intended to be phased out in mid-'84 but latest indications are that it will extend into 1985-86 though production will be considerably scaled down in the extension period. In fact, that process has already started with HAL's production schedule for 35 MiG-21s in 1983-84 having been scaled down to 17 aircraft.

But the wisdom of that decision is questionable, as the French are quick to point out. Their reasoning is that there is nothing to stop India from producing the MiG-29s at their Nasik plant, where the MiG-21s are currently being manufactured. But that should not deter the Government from going in for the Mirage-2000 production line at HAL's Bangalore factory where the Jaguars are being assembled. The French argument is that since Bangalore is already geared and equipped to produce western aircraft, it would be logical and far more practical to switch from Jaguar production to that of the Mirage-2000.

THE FRENCH also insist that the Mirage is no less superior to the F-16 in terms of long-range striking capability, the radar system and armaments which enables the Mirage to detect, lock in and fire its weapon system far in advance of the F-16. The French also point out that Soviet aircraft like the MiG-29 may be cheaper than those available in the West, but actually work out as expensive because of the shorter life-span of the parts. Soviet aircraft engines, for instance, have about half the life-span of western aircraft engines like the Snecma M53 being fitted on the Mirage.



Dilbagh Singh flying the Mirage-2000

There is also the unquestionable fact that the technology transfer being offered by the French for the Mirage production will offer HAL unrestricted access to state-of-the-art aircraft technology which could be later used for India's own future projects like the proposed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme. It would, for instance, give HAL engineers a firsthand knowledge of third generation aircraft technology like chemical etching and milling and, more important, the manufacture of components made from composite materials which are being billed as the future wonder material for aircraft production in the '90s because of its lighter weight and strength. The Mirage uses components built of carbon and boron fibre and this is one area where the Soviets are still far behind the West.

Other access would be to the advanced avionics and the fly-by-wire electrical flight control systems. But the main point the French are trying to hammer home is the industrial investment it represents for HAL and the Indian aeronautical industry. Their estimates are that airframe production work alone represents 1.2 million working hours. This figure would double if India agrees to manufacture the Snecma engine and triple if it opts for producing the avionics as well. Production of the Mirage, the French point out, would also provide the Indian aircraft industry with adequate workload for the next 20 years since a combat aircraft generates about the same workload in overhaul, spare parts and ammunition as the aircraft's operational life.

But statistics and graphs are less likely to impress the Indian Government than political pressure which is one area where the Soviets score heavily. The MiG-29 decision, or, for that matter, the Mirage production decision, will evidently contain a powerful political element. As it is, the Soviets, in the last year, have slowly wrested back their domination of Indian arms inventory, particularly in regard to the IAF. India now has the MiG-23 BN for tactical strike, replacing the slower SU-7s, the MiG-21 Bis, FL and MF and the MiG-23 MF for interception and the MiG-25 RU for high-level reconnaisance. The MiG-27 is due to be inducted for ground attack and the AN-32 and IL-76 for transport.

Against that background, it is evident that the Soviets have convinced the Indian Government that military dependence on Moscow does not necessarily translate into political dependence and that they are as prepared as the West to grant India access to the latest weaponry and, at a cheaper rate. India will gain technologically if it does opt for the Mirage production but indications are that it will ask Dassault to extend the deadline. By which time the Mirage may yet turn out to be a mirage.

— DILIP BOBB

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TATA STEEL, the only integrated steel plant in the private sector in India, is known all over the world for its professional management and expertise in steel technology. It will be participating for the first time in its 78 year corporate history in an outside venture as a promoter-cum-technology supplier.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- **Promoted by TATA STEEL and IPICOL (TATA STEEL and IPICOL are participating in IPITATA's Equity to the extent of Rs. 3.00 crores and Rs. 3.12 crores respectively).**
- **TATA STEEL provides process know-how and technical consultancy.**
- **IPITATA will use the 'TISCO DIRECT REDUCTION' process—a proven and versatile technology developed and patented by TATA STEEL in India, Australia and New Zealand.**
- **50% of IPITATA's production will be bought by TATA STEEL at ruling market prices.**
- **Tax Benefits under Section 80CC and 80L of the Income Tax Act, 1961.**

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KONDA REDDIS

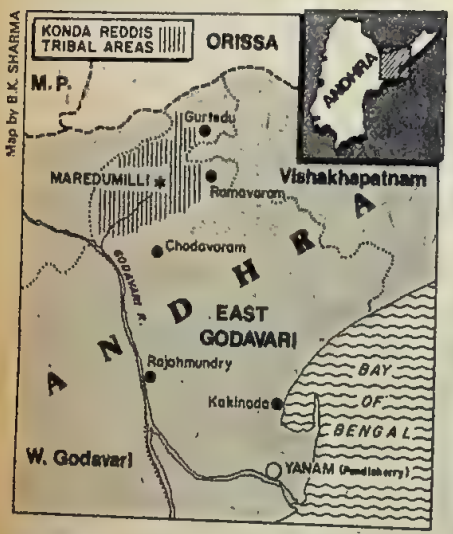
Rising Militancy

THE ROOTS of militancy lie in exploitation. Nothing demonstrates the truth of that more than the vast and amorphous tribal population in the country. Even the most peaceful of them are now using their primitive weapons for purposes other than hunting for food. The latest manifestation of this trend is in Andhra Pradesh where the Konda Reddis, a tribe who inhabit the forested hills flanking the Godavari river where it breaks through the Eastern Ghats, are showing signs of a dangerous militancy. An aboriginal people, the Konda (hill) Reddis have been leading a marginal existence with meagre incomes from subsistence farming and tree-felling.

Government efforts to better their lot began many years ago but so far have shown little results. The consequence of that is now assuming alarming proportions. A restive minority among the otherwise easy-going tribals have turned to the Naxalites to help them achieve their ends.

The People's War Group (PWG) faction Naxalites has been active in central In for quite some time now, informing the t bals of their economic, social and politi rights as well as providing summary j traordinary justice, often with violen (INDIA TODAY, April 30).

The rising trend of militancy is only reaction to a long history of exploitation Konda Reddis by forest contractors. T tribals are experts at tree-felling but co tractors have been paying them absurd low wages. Added to this is the fact that t Government's efforts to improve their sta dard of living has borne little fruit. Both t



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Forests cleared for farming (below left) and remains of the burnt trucks





PHOTOGRAPHS BY A. PRABHAKAR RAO

Central and state governments have set up myriad schemes to protect the tribal's interests. These include the establishment of an Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) based at Rampachodavaram. To gauge the extent of the new militancy and the Government's failure to improve the living standards of the tribals, Correspondent AMARNATH K. MENON *travelled to the area. His report:*

THE LIVES of the Konda Reddis have changed little since Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, the well-known German anthropologist, first brought them to international notice in 1941. Maredumilli is one of the blocks of the East Godavari district where a majority of the Konda Reddis live. There are 45,000 tribals spread over an area of 438,450 acres in 413 villages. But even in the most populous areas the population density is as low as 34 persons per sq km. The poor man-to-land ratio in the hilly inhospitable terrain and the low literacy rate (1.22 per cent) is reflected in the lack of progress.

Last fortnight, the Naxalite-inspired destruction of two trucks on the Mamadivada ghat road once again brought them back into national focus. The militant PWG has been active since last February and apart from last fortnight's incidents, have also set ablaze six trucks and two jeeps in the area. So far their demands have centered around medical and other services for the paper mill workers. In the latest incident the trucks were set on fire just 200 yards from a paper mill camp. Said H.R. Choudary, the site supervisor: "The Naxalites did their talking at gunpoint and we had to do as they ordered. The group of nine people asked our workers to stack bamboo below the truck chassis and in the drivers' cabins to make sure the vehicles were completely gutted. They also demanded that the workers be given rice at Rs 2 a kilo."

After the latest incidence of militancy, C. Arjuna Rao, the state's home and tribal welfare secretary, ordered officials in the East Godavari district to step up anti-Naxalite operations. But obviously such a move would not have been necessary if the steps taken earlier to preserve tribal interests had been actually implemented. The advent of the Naxalites in the tribal area is a direct result of the Government's failure to raise the standard of living of the tribals and bring to them any of the benefits of modernisation.

Says Maredumilli Panchayat Samiti President K.R. Reddi: "There has been no improvement in the tribals' condition. Instead the freedom to practise their way of agriculture — moving from one cleared patch of forest to another — and their search for food is being restricted by forest guards. When our people pick firewood they demand a chicken as a bribe.

The rising trend of militancy is only a reaction to a long history of exploitation of Konda Reddis. The Government's efforts to improve their standard of living has borne little fruit.

But they remain silent when others ferry bamboo and timber by trucks." What makes matters worse is that indiscriminate felling of trees in the tribal area has not only damaged the ecological equilibrium but has also made it even more difficult for the tribals to earn their already precarious livelihood.

Adding to their neglect has been the reluctance of even the lowest-level village worker to visit the Reddi villages, as that would mean a slog up several steep kilometres. Says Achyut Desai, a member of the East Godavari zilla parishad, sarcastically: "Officials, whatever their rank feel like Tenzing Norgay when they visit any of these villages for the first time." Most officials feel a posting to the area is a punishment, and this results in indifference to their work. Efforts are made to move out as soon as possible. Admits K. Mathajee, the woman block development officer (BDO) of Maredumilli: "Few have a commitment to work among the tribals even though they have respect and regard for us. Little is done to promote awareness and few supervisory officials go round on inspection." The officer confesses that although she's been in the block for only a year she herself is trying to get a transfer.



Splitting bamboo for forest plantations

This indifference on the part of the officials is manifest in the poor utilisation of funds released by the Government under its special Konda Reddi scheme. Nearly Rs 12 lakh of about Rs 40 lakh given as special assistance remains unused. In Maredumilli block the ordinary banking schemes to help the tribals buy plough bullocks, carts, sheep, oil engines and electric motors have not gotten off the ground. Only 466 of the 967 schemes sanctioned for 1983-84 in the block have been taken up. BDO Mathajee accuses the bank officials of indifference. But Andhra Bank Manager Sambasiva Rao counters that the block development office does not provide the techno-economic feasibility reports which are needed by the bank.

Whatever be the cause of the officials' ineffectiveness, the tribals continue to be taken advantage of. For example, five villagers of Yerrametla village were given plough bullocks which they were told cost less than Rs 1,200 a pair. But when they got the loan recovery cards the amount due was Rs 1,400 a pair. The tribals' crime was that they could not count. In Vemulakonda, Kannan Reddi and Ram Reddi got Rs 375 for their plough bullock that had died even though the animal had been insured for Rs 500, its market value. But the Rs 375 was adjusted against the loan and the original purpose of giving them a pair of cattle, for systematic farming forgotten.

In another case, Kathula Sanayasama of Tadepalli was refused a certificate saying that seven of her sheep had died unless she brought the dead animals all the way to the block headquarters, which, of course, she found impossible. The certificate was required by her to claim the insurance on the animals. She was then forced to sell the rest of her sheep for Rs 900 to repay her loan. Admitted an official of the ITDA frankly: "We are assessed on the basis of set targets and not by

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ow our subsidies and loans help the ribals. Our main concern is to show the gures for distribution and number of be- eficiaries." The spirit to help the tribals ets strangled once again in bureaucracy nd lethargy. Many of the women earn oney though a scheme in which they ake and sell brooms tied with plastic. ut one of them, Pallala Chittiamma says hat each of the 8-kg bags of plastic wire iven to the women weighed 150 gm less han they should have.

Some Konda Reddis, especially hose who have more contact with the lains, are aware of the exploitation. Says achi Reddi, sarpanch of Maredumilli: If officials know we realise the benefits e can get from the Government they ake us run around several times to tire s and make us ultimately give up." One f the tribals aware of the potential of the rea is Kanam Lingaiah, who is growing ashew on a three-acre plot in the hope he ill get title to the land later. However, ost others from his village of Darigu- em earn a paltry Rs 6 a day for splitting amboo to use as markers in a go- ernment teak plantation.

PERHAPS the only way for the Konda Reddis to take more con- trol of their lives and reap some of the uits of modernisation is through educa- on. But their already low literacy rate of 22 per cent is poised to slip to an even wer level. Schools have had little impact ere for want of teachers and facilities. hen teachers are available they prefer live in roadside villages and visit the chools only two or three times a week. he upper primary school at Bodduluru s only two teachers instead of the seven requires. None of its students has assed even the class seven exam.

Osmania University lecturer P. Jaya- rakash Rao, who has travelled inten- vely in the area, recalls: "The ashram chool in Gangavaram has 44 students on s rolls. But when I went there one day in ebruary only 12 were in class. Surpri- ngly, the teacher could identify only our students by name. He could not re- ember the title of the first lesson in the elugu textbook for the fifth class. It was hocking to hear him confess that he aught the first and second class lessons to ll attending the school. One of the two eachers of this type of boarding school is sually out buying groceries as he is also iven the job of warden for an extra Rs 35 month."

Raising the educational standards of he Konda Reddis would be very hard to o. The Tribal Cultural Resources Trai-



There has been no improvement in the tribals' condition. Instead the freedom to practice their way of agriculture and their search for food is being restricted.

—K.R. REDDI,
president, Panchayat Samiti

ning Institute (TCRTI) estimates that 74 per cent of expenses on education is frittered away. As an alternative, remarks ITDA project officer Manohar Prasad: "Schools should be merged and formal education given only to those tribals interested in it. The few who are regular can then get better quality education." TCRTI Director Mohan Rao emphasises that education must free the tribals from the mesh of irrational taboos and superstitions that ring their lives. "Most tribals begin farming after they have sacrificed an animal or a bird. They think that death or ill health is due to some evil spirit or magic by their enemies. Their education must be reoriented and woven around their immediate problems." Adds Prasad: "Outdated farming practices are responsible for low yields. The scope for farming can be improved by building check dams to store the water gushing down the hill streams for irrigation. Oranges, mangoes and cash crops could then be grown in plenty."



Dried fish, the staple diet, on sale

The Konda Reddis do not ask for much. Many of them are quite content with their forest life. As the first showers of the south-west monsoon rain on their steep hill slopes they dig the land with sticks and cast their seeds wide to raise pulses, sorghum and coarse millet which will be sufficient for their needs for a few months. For the rest of the year they subsist on wild tubers, mushrooms and game hunted in the forest. In the backyards of their thatched homes they grow chillies, barley and tobacco. They exchange the produce they collect for other needs like salt and dried fish, a favourite food.

Fortunately for the Konda Reddis, alienation from the land which has been the bane of tribal societies elsewhere in the country is not much of an issue here. Large-scale occupation by non-tribals of their traditional preserve has yet to occur. But incipient signs of just such a development exist. Trouble has been brewing in Kondamadulu and other areas closer to the plains as non-tribals begin to occupy tracts in the area. There have been suspicions that some officials have cheated tribals by giving them title deeds to land, which is not in their power to do. Another problem lies in the extension of the reserve forest by the Forest Department shrinking the Konda Reddis' home turf. The Forest Department claims it is being deprived of 1,000 acres in East Godavari district. The matter has yet to be settled.

Disputes over land are also increasing, but justice is slow to be meted out. In the tribal areas, the tehsildars in addition to their many other duties must hold court as magistrates. Says Rampachodavaram Tehsildar M. Subba Rao: "In many land disputes, justice delayed is justice denied. But we cannot hold court as often as we wish to dispose of cases." Whatever the problem, the Konda Reddis now seem determined to fight fire with fire.

UTTAR PRADESH

Mistress of Murder

THE BRUTAL carnage in Astha village in the dacoit-infested Etawah district of Uttar Pradesh last month has left behind surprisingly mild after-effects among the villagers. Barely a fortnight after the massacre which left 15 people dead, including a woman and child burnt alive, the pain and anguish seems to have been virtually forgotten. In its place, is the birth of yet another legend. Around cooking fires and in village gatherings, the sole topic of conversation is instead the perpetrator of the bloody murders, Kusma Nain, 23, rival claimant to Phoolan Devi's title of bandit queen.

Kusma announced her presence to the world in much the same manner that Phoolan Devi did; with a hail of bullets and a litter of bodies. The similarity does not end there. A police history sheet prepared on May 7, 1981, describes her as a cold-blooded killer with an insatiable thirst for vengeance. Her action in personally stripping the wife of the pradhan in Astha merely to humiliate her tallies with the police profile on her. "She is no dacoit queen as the media is describing her," says a senior police official, "she is a bloody menace."

That view does fit in with her past record, but Kusma is clearly following Phoolan Devi's footsteps in the hope of gaining the same international notoriety. "If she (Phoolan) can kill 20 people, surrender two years later and gain world-wide publicity, so can I," she is reported to have announced. With that cold-blooded motive in mind, Kusma was last week hiding in the ravines on the Jalaun-Etawah border with her latest paramour, dacoit Lala Ram and another gang member, having given the police combing operations the slip.

The build-up to the carnage in Astha is rooted in Kusma's background. Daughter of a peon in a municipal school, she married Kedar Nath, a farmer who owned three acres of land in Karoli village about six years ago but even then she was obviously destined for notoriety. Her family has disowned her and considered her a slur on the family name for her wayward ways. Her husband, Kedar Nath is mortally afraid for his life. "Ever since she ran away to the ravines, I have spent very little time in the village. If she sees me she will kill me," he says.

Stories of Kusma's past does not evoke much sympathy, with her relatives confirming the view that she was a nymphomaniac. Her husband says he knew little about this side of her character, although she was supposedly known for her many affairs before marriage. With the wisdom of delayed hindsight, Kedar Nath said wearily: "If I had known this, I would never have allowed myself to be trapped."

Kusma was involved with dacoit Madho Mallah longer than with any other man and, on the night of March 8, 1978, he landed in Karoli, grabbed the all-too-eager Kusma, and fled into the ravines. She was only 17. When Madho Mallah forged forces with the dreaded Vikram Mallah gang (of which Phoolan Devi was a member) on December 28, 1979, she was only his mistress—far removed from the business of dacoity and killing. But she was exposed to dangers of all sorts. Injured by a stray bullet in a police encounter in Jalaun, Kusma was sent to Delhi for treatment. She was arrested by the Delhi police in February, 1980, and despatched to Etawah jail. By this time, Vikram Mallah had already begun showing interest in Kusma (Phoolan was then his mistress) and he spent a lot of money to secure bail for the girl. But Kusma was quicker—she jumped bail to join Vikram Mallah.

The two women, Phoolan a Kusma, were bitterly jealous of ea other and constantly craved the attenti of the men in the gang. It was this that l to the break-up of the Vikram Mall gang. Kusma complained to Siyara also one of Kusma's former lovers, ab Vikram's plans to kill him, resulting Siyaram murdering Vikram. Phool left without a lover, then formed her o gang and swore to avenge the killing.

Siyaram's gang, comprising his br ther Lala Ram, Kusma and a few othe though small, was effective. Kusma liv as a concubine among the dacoits. In t jungles, her life was, as one police offic described, an animal's existence. As t gang grew increasingly ruthless in its op rations (they ambushed numerous poli patrols), there was little sign that Kus was playing any kind of a pivotal role the gang's activities.

The surrender of arch rival Phool Devi on February 12, 1983, more th anything else, is said to have inspi Kusma. To begin with, Kusma decided take revenge on one Parshuram, who, years earlier, had raped her. In Ma 1984, in Astha village, Kusma gunn down Parshuram. But one killing was o viously not enough. The idea of a m killing to attract publicity is said to ha appealed to Kusma and about t months before the Astha killings, she believed, by police reports, to have r hearsed the event using five Thakurs f target practice. Fortunately for them th were only shot in their knees.



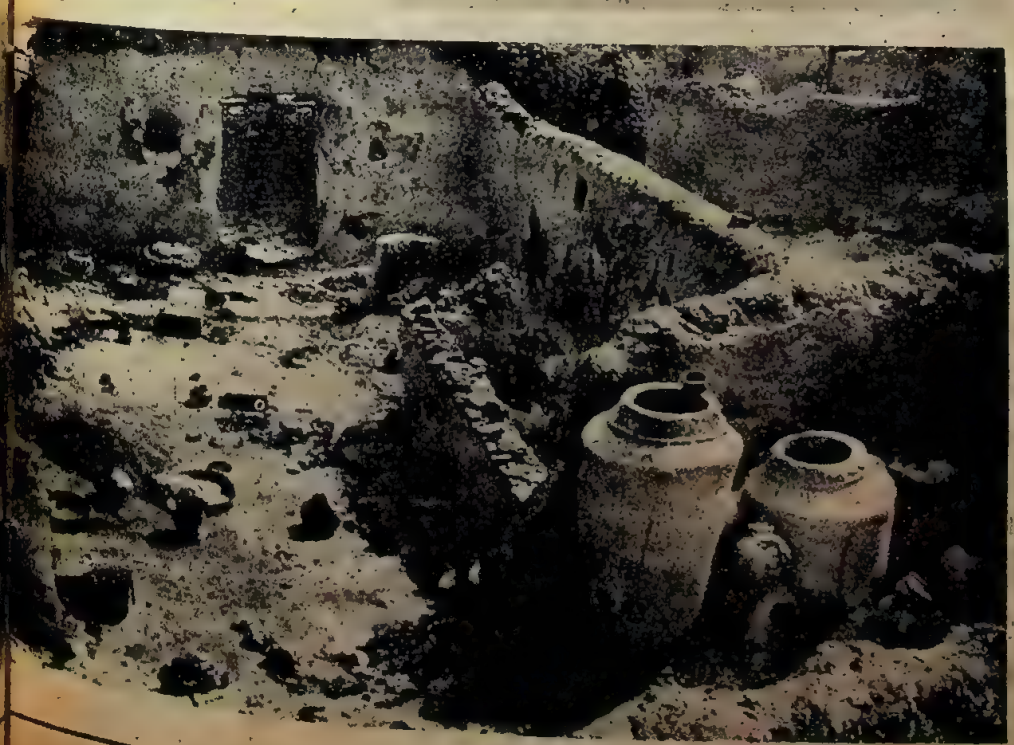
Parshuram's death, however, did not go unavenged. His 'godfather', dacoit Jagdish Mallah took care of that. On hearing that Kusma and her gang had been seen emerging from Romai village, lying just across the river from Astha, Jagdish stormed into Romai, and killed three Thakurs. A few days later, Kusma struck at Astha, in the belief that the village was providing shelter to Jagdish.

THE ROMAI killings saw messages being flashed to the top police officials in Etawah alerting them and asking them to expect repercussions on caste lines. But the state Government merely remained lackadaisical, as is seen in the manner in which the SSP, Etawah, G.K. Shukla handled the situation. He had not only received intimation about Romai, but had had specific information about the event to come at Astha. Two days before the tragedy, Janata Party leader Tripathi had demanded police protection for Astha because they feared reprisal for Romai. Besides, a villager had also filed a separate complaint about the same matter on his own.

G.K. Shukla, who has since been suspended, said that he had asked station officers to proceed to Astha. "What can I do if they return?" he asked. Precisely one hour after they returned, the tragedy occurred. In the normal course, the SSP should have checked up whether the police party had actually reached Astha and asked for a compliance report. This was not done. The lethargy of the state Government in reacting to information suggesting reprisal is equally revealing.

On the face of it, there does not seem to be any motive for the carnage. If personal vendetta was the reason on earlier occasions, the Astha killings seem inexplicable, considering the magnitude of the crime. The police have mounted intense combing operations in the region, but flushing out the dacoits is a daunting proposition. Travelling in pitch darkness over narrow, dirt tracks with only the headlights of jeeps to illumine the path is even less reassuring. Working through hundreds of kilometres in and around Jalaun district under such circumstances renders operations nearly impossible. Reports of the movements of gangs are reported to the police through runners or informers, but by the time the police arrive on the scene, the dacoits are long gone. And now that police patrolling has become so intense in the area the gangs are constantly on the move to avoid being apprehended.





Widows of the Astha victims (left); the looted houses (below) and the victims: cold-blooded carnage

Even as the jungles of Etawah, Jalaun and Bhind camouflage this cat and mouse game, there are serious indications that the Astha carnage may have triggered off a serious caste war. Kusma and Siyaram were being helped by the Thakurs. Jagdish Mallah, on the other hand, enjoys the support of the Mallah community. In fact, Mallah is reported to have already reorganised his gang and is said to be waiting for police pressure to let up before launching his onslaught.

There is suspicion that Thakurs were brought from other villages to commit the massacre at Astha. That outsiders were involved is clear because as many as 12 dacoits were spotted, whereas Siyaram's gang is said to be only five-strong. Thakur Rashpal Singh of Hasanpur village, who participated in the Astha ourtrage and who surrendered to the police at Jaluan, revealed: "Kusma approached me and said 'How can you keep quiet when Thakurs are being murdered? Come with me and take your revenge'."

If the move to initiate Kusma's surrender succeeds, it is unlikely it will be known whether more Thakurs were involved in Astha. But the fact is, the surrenders of Phoolan Devi and Malkhan Singh organised by the Madhya Pradesh Government and accompanied by pomp and ceremony, raising the dacoits to the level of national celebrities seems only to inspire lesser dacoits to attempt scaling 'greater' heights. — RAJU SANTHANAM in Etawah

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SWIL LIMITED

(Formerly Shalimar Wires & Industries Limited)

Speech of Shri S.N. Khaitan, Chairman of the Board of Directors on the occasion of the 21st Annual General Meeting of the Company, held on Saturday the 2nd June, 1984



Highlights

A decade of growth and prosperity:

	1972-73	1982-83 (18 months)
	(Rs. inlacs)	
Gross Block	148.87	870.76
Sales	110.83	842.78
Gross Profit	21.28	128.83
Shareholders fund	74.23	259.48
Dividend paid/payable	3.60	24.71
Payment to employees	21.64	117.67

* **Fourdrinier Wire Cloth market being saturated, SWIL diversifies to consolidate its future**
* **New Copper Alloy and Copper Strips Project already in production**
* **Frest Public Issue on the anvil**

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 21st Annual General Meeting of your company. The Directors Report and the Accounts for the 18 months period ended 31st December 1983 have already been in your hands and with your kind permission I shall take them as read.

Working Results:

It has been the policy of your company to forge ahead and convert threats into opportunity. Our Governmental rules and procedures are indeed cumbersome and lengthy. These procedures are impediments in achieving a faster rate of growth as, for example, achieved in Singapore and South Korea. In spite of these hurdles, your company has shown a reasonable performance during the period under review..

The turnover of your company has improved during the period from last year's Rs. 524 lacs (12 months) to Rs. 843 lacs (18 months). The gross profit before depreciation has increased from Rs. 75 lacs in the previous year to Rs. 129 lacs in the period under review.

Dividend:

Your company has continued to have an unblemished record of dividends for more than 15 years and your directors are happy to recommend a final dividend of 10% on equity shares in addition to the interim dividend of 12% already paid, thus making a total dividend of 22% for the period under review.

Review of Operations:

Your company's traditional product i.e. Fourdrinier Wire Cloth which is marketed to the Paper and Newsprint industry has acquired an important place in the manufacture of paper. This product is very well accepted by the paper industry. Although there has been a growth in the installed capacity of the paper industry in our country, the demand for Fourdrinier Wire Cloth has more or less stagnated around 1,20,000 sq. mts. The main reason for this stagnation in the demand is the improved quality of Fourdrinier Wire Cloth and introduction of Synthetic Fabrics. The present demand is being adequately met by the existing manufacturers. In fact, the existing installed capacity for Fourdrinier Wire Cloth is remaining unutilised by more than 40%. Your company has also established Synthetic Wire Cloth manufactured by it for the first time in the country under foreign collaboration. This has definitely helped the paper industry in increasing their productivity and quality of paper considerably. In keeping with past tradition of serving paper mills in a better way, your company has introduced yet another new concept of SWIL PACK SYSTEM for the benefit of the paper industry. This system offers a comprehensive package for revamping of the fourdrinier section of the Paper Machine.

The Non-Ferrous Division of your company has shown considerable improvement over the last five years. The production of Copper and Copper Alloy products has inreased from 168 tonnes in 1977–78 to 703 tonnes in 1982–83 (18 months).

Diversification:

To maintain the growth rate, in view of the saturated market of the paper industry, your company has embarked upon a major diversification. It has decided to diversify into manufacture of strips of copper and copper alloy and the project with a capital outlay of Rs. 9.10 crores is being set up at Nasik, Maharashtra. We will manufacture 2400 tonnes annually of Copper Alloy Strips which are required for various sophisticated end users, such as Electronic, Automobile, Telecommunication, Radiator industry, etc. The first phase of the project has been already commissioned in December, 1983. The commercial production has already started and the second phase of the project is likely to be completed by the end of July 1984. Once we are able to achieve our full rated capacity of production, turnover of your company is expected to increase to Rs. 20 crores annually. To raise part of the resources for setting up of this project SWILL will soon make an issue of 5,45,000 Equity Shares of Rs. 10/- each for cash at a premium of Rs. 2 per share out of which 1,70,000 Equity Shares are reserved for promoters, their friends, relatives and business associates and balance 3,75,000 Equity Shares to the public.

The company has also a diversification programme in hand for the manufacture of 3000 tonnes of Copper Alloy Tubes. A major portion of this investment will be towards the import substitution.

Indirect Taxation:

The Government of India had introduced a new item TI 68 in the Central Excise Tariff on 1.3.1975 with an initial incidence of rate of duty of 1%, which has been increased by 10 times in about 8 years time. The company's liabilities on account of Central Excise Duty increased from 1.76 lacs in 1975–76 to Rs. 64.94 lacs in 1982–83 (18 months). The high incidence of Central Excise Duty thus plays a vital role in determining the market for the organised sector. The Government of India has been giving concessions and exemptions to specific items only after they reach a stage of stagnation.

Existing Company—Restraint in Growth:

While the existing company is hardly in a position to retain surplus funds from its profits after payment of Corporate tax @55%, repayment of existing term loans, normal capital expenditures and high rate of dividend from post tax profit, the banks and financial institutions have been insisting for higher percentage of owned funds to meet requirements of working capital and new projects. Lately, Tandon Committee and Chore Committee had recommended still higher share of owned funds in the total working capital finance. I therefore suggest that the Government should review this aspect in its totality and see for themselves as to whether the exsting companies have the scope of ploughing back so much of internal accruals and if not should make suitable adjustments wherever necessary as otherwise it is bound to hamper the process of growth.

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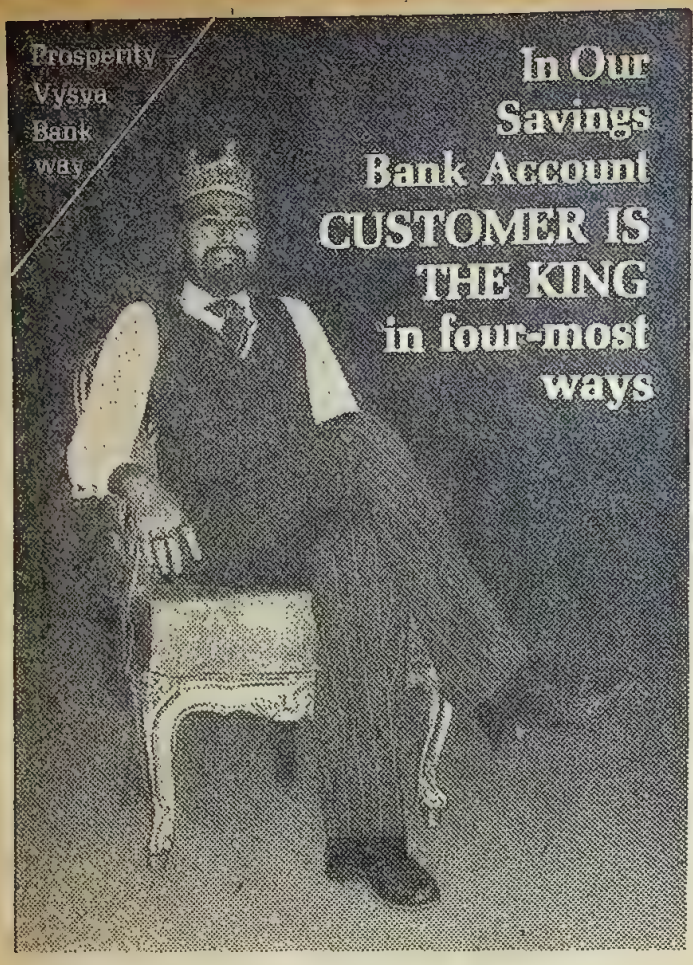
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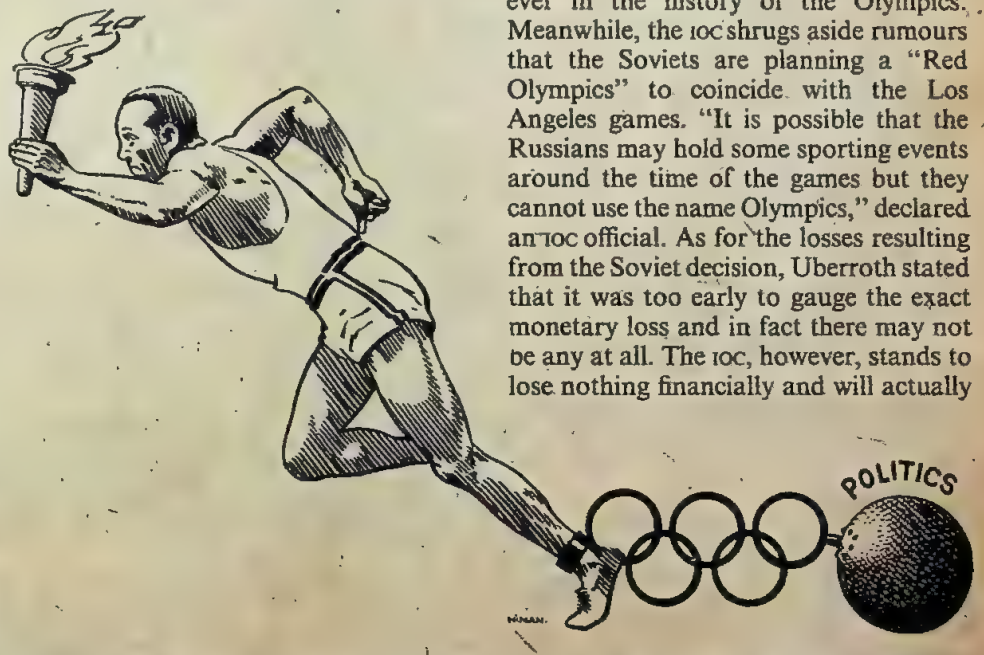
The Flickering Flame

NO OTHER sporting event can match it for sheer prestige. Yet, that prestige was in peril last ortnight as the June 2 deadline came and ent and with it all remaining hope that he Soviet Union would retract their dra- atic decision to boycott the Olympic ames in Los Angeles. The Swiss-based nternational Olympic Committee (IOC), ll-equipped to deal with such a situation, ould do little but engage in a feverish hirl of diplomatic activity. "We will ght till the last minute on June 2," IOC resident Juan Samaranch declared in etween his hectic shuttles to try and re- olve the crisis. But it was clearly whist- ng in the dark.

In fact, the IOC's only slender hope ted with Samaranch himself. His ear- r experience as a diplomat in Moscow anted him access to top Soviet leaders. ut the Soviets were clearly out of the ames and in no mood to lose face by re- ersing their decision. Samaranch arrived Moscow but failed to get beyond Vice- rime Minister Nikolai Talazin. Admit- d a depressed Samaranch the day after e deadline expired: "The Soviets have ealt with the problem at the only level ey think it should be dealt with."

Last week, in a rare outburst, Sama- nch flatly accused former US president mmy Carter of "hurting the Olympic ovement the most". The reference was o the former president's decision to boy- tt the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. Sa- ranch's statement confirmed the view hat many officials in the IOC had already rivately held; that the Soviet boycott as a case of pure revenge. Samaranch, owever, also confirmed that an accom- anying factor was the steady deteriora- on of relations between the two super- owers. Admitted a senior IOC official: We feel that the Soviet decision was di- ected against President Reagan." The oviets themselves have remained tight- pped about the boycott except to deny hat their decision had anything to do ith the US boycott of the Moscow lympics and to reiterate that threats to oviet athletes and officials and over- ommercialisation of the games by the os Angeles Olympic Organising Com- ittee (LAOOC) necessitated the pull-out. ounters an IOC official: "We have seen ome of the anti-Soviet posters and I ink that the Soviets are exaggerating the point. Broadly, they told us that their boycott stems from the non-respect of the Olympic charter on the part of the US."

The Olympic charter does state in Article 9 of the Fundamental Principles that: "The games are contacts between individuals and teams and not between countries." But considering the rock-bottom state of relations between the two superpowers and the fact that no city in the world is more over-commercialised than Los Angeles, it was surprising that the Soviet boycott caught the IOC napping. On April 24, Samaranch and three vice-presidents of the IOC convened a meeting with M. Gramov, chairman of the Soviet Olympic Committee and Peter Uberroth, president of the LAOOC. "We were reassured after that meeting that all parties were satisfied", says Michele Verdier, a senior IOC official, "when suddenly on May 8, the Russians announced the boycott we were taken aback." Though the Soviet decision was all too obviously a political one, their charges of over-commercialisation and hostility towards their athletes does have some basis. Greek athletes also threatened to boycott the lighting of the Olympic flame if the LAOOC went ahead with their plan to sell the Olympic flame kilometre by kilometre during its journey across the US. Samaranch, however, defends the move and claims it was misunderstood. "With regard to the Olympic torch relay, though it was difficult for us to understand, the idea is purely an American way of raising money to assist sport for the handicapped," he says. The Soviets were not convinced, specially when "Kill a Russian" badges began to surface for sale in Los Angeles.



For all that, IOC officials are still optimistic about the games and insist that the spirit of the Olympics is not dead. There is elation about China's participation for the first time with a contingent of over 300 athletes. Even with the 14 countries that pulled out along with the Soviets, a total of 141 countries have confirmed their entries by June 2, the largest number ever in the history of the Olympics. Meanwhile, the IOC shrugs aside rumours that the Soviets are planning a "Red Olympics" to coincide with the Los Angeles games. "It is possible that the Russians may hold some sporting events around the time of the games but they cannot use the name Olympics," declared an IOC official. As for the losses resulting from the Soviet decision, Uberroth stated that it was too early to gauge the exact monetary loss and in fact there may not be any at all. The IOC, however, stands to lose nothing financially and will actually gain. As the sole authority for selling broadcasting rights for the games, they will be earning $225 million from the Associated Broadcasting Company (ABC) television network.

But whatever the success of the Los Angeles games, the key question now being asked is will the Soviets repeat their boycott for the 1988 Olympics scheduled for Seoul in South Korea? During his meeting with Soviet officials in Moscow last fortnight, Samaranch was reassured by the Soviet side that they would participate in the 1988 games. But their presence would certainly be resented by the South Koreans even five years after the Korean Airline controversy. IOC officials are aware that it is a sensitive issue which is almost certain to be resurrected. "Five years is a very long time and people forget things," says Verdier optimistically. But as the Soviet boycott has dramatically revealed, Moscow did not forget the US boycott of their Games and the South Koreans have even longer memories.

—CHITRA SUBRAMANIAM in Geneva

MOUNTAINEERING

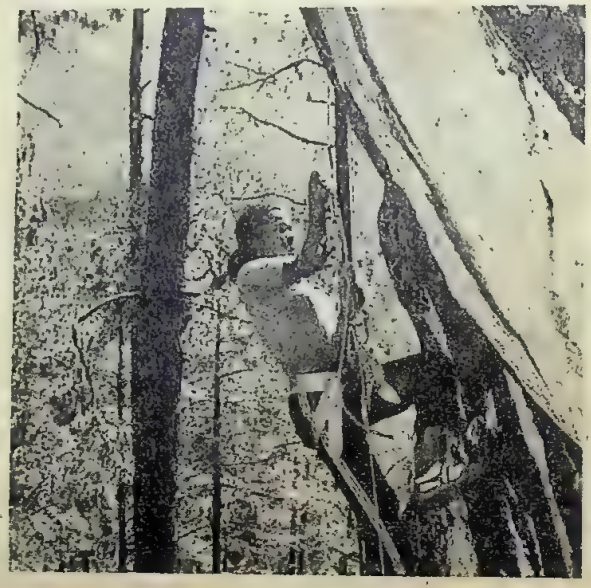
Triumph at the Top

BACHENDRI Pal, 29, who became this summer the first woman to scale Everest, is a short-legged, tough, narrow-eyed girl from Uttarkashi in the Himalayan foothills. The achievements of the hill girl will go down along with Tenzing Norgay, the path-breaking Indian member of the 1953 Everest duo, in the mountaineering annals.

On May 23, when Pal, along with three of her team members, trudged her way on to the wind-swept summit, she created history in more ways than one. Besides being the first woman from the Indian subcontinent to make it to the top, she had survived, only a week ago, an avalanche accident in which her tent at camp III—24,600 feet above the mean sea level—had got buried under five feet of snow. "Only a girl of Bachendri's stamina and grit could stand the psychological shock and go ahead with the final assault of the peak," said Harish Chandra Sarin, Indian ambassador to Nepal and president of the sponsoring committee of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation that sponsored the expedition, India's fourth since the unsuccessful maiden attempt in 1960.

Though 167 people have made it to the top of the Everest so far, the roll of conquest is weighted rather adversely against women, only four of whom achieved the distinction before Pal. Junko Tabei, the legendary Japanese woman mountaineer was responsible for the breakthrough in 1975, followed by Than Tang, the Tibetan girl in the Chinese expedition of 1976; Rutkiewicz Wanda, the Polish expeditionist in 1978; and Hannelore Schmatz, member of a German team in 1979. Schmatz's feat was tinted with tragedy as she could never return from the top, having slipped into an open crevasse along the treacherous 2,500-foot ice-fall between the base camp (17,700 feet) and camp I (20,000 feet). The ice-fall, made of chunks and blocks of ice tumbling over each other, has claimed well over 40 of the 60 Everest casualties from the Nepal side so far.

Pal was no doubt luckier than teammate Rita Gombu, daughter of ace mountaineer Nawang Gombu, who had trouble with her oxygen gear and had to come back from a point only 600 feet short of the summit. But the team set up several records: Sherpa Ang Dorjee, who reached the summit with Pal, carried no oxygen with him thus being the second mountaineer in the world to accomplish it after the redoubtable Reinhold Messner.





Pal (right) and in pre-Everest training: true grit

Also, at the team's first attempt to the summit on May 9, Phu Dorjee, the bearded member, reached the top without oxygen, thus being the first Indian to climb all the way up breathing the thin air. Phu is an Indian settled in Karnataka. Unlike him, Ang is a Nepalese citizen.

The 16-member Indian team was felicitated by the whole nation on their return for having put four of its members—Pal, Phu Dorjee, Lhatoo Dorjee, Sonam Palzor—on the summit, beside Ang Dorjee. But the glare of publicity naturally shone more on Pal, who, as team captain Colonel Darshan Kumar Khullar told INDIA TODAY, "has stolen the show". Ever since her return to India, Pal has been receiving fan-mail weighing 5-6 kg a day. She said: "It's nice to receive so much of attention, but nothing can match the glorious excitement of standing at the summit—alone." Pal, who had some tense moments while returning because her 'rope-mate' Palzor had sustained an injury on his right knee, had plant metal image of the goddess Durga i snowy mantle at the summit, where precipitation constantly gives an burial to flags, crosses and such souvenirs of the previous year's quests. Falling into something of a verie, Pal said: "To me, being at the was like being close to God."

There is hardly anything in Pal's bringing which could have satisfacto explained her love of the mountains. did her masters in Sanskrit, but she counts with a shrug the possib of her being attracted by mountains through the evoca lines on the Himalayas in Sanskrit poetry of the Gupta "It was in my blood," she says a smile that can alternately be erpreted as coy and victori And, a love for mountainee does not seem to be a family t either. Krishan Singh Pal, he ther, is a farmer.

The 1984 Indian expedi was certainly blessed with be technological aids than its pre cessors—the two unsuccessful tempts in 1960 and 1962 and successful one in 1965 in wh nine members made it to the su mit. Says Khullar: "As aga nine camps between the base the summit earlier, we have o four now."

Better technology may h made things easier for the climb but mountaineering is still triumph of the individual's brav and skill over nature. "It require tremendous concentration," s Khullar, "and Bachendri is c ble of concentrating; she is a str climber."

The conquerer of the Everest i sadder person because, for him the mys que of the great peak is lost and there no bigger challenges to overcome. E Sir Edmund Hillary's voice was ting with sadness about his 1953 conqu when he wrote, 25 years later: "I gain challenges on other mountains, on Antarctic continent, on rivers... fi rest moulded my life, but that was a qua ter of a century ago." Once having set foot on the highest point of the plan which other peaks will the intrep woman mountaineer try to scale next haven't thought. But no other peak ri rival Everest," says she, mouthing wi can at once be a cliché and an expressi of honest bewilderment.

—SUMIT MIT



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KESORAM RAYON FACTORY

The Invisible Menace

THE INVISIBLE gas invades the atmosphere without warning. But for the inhabitants of the 14 villages scattered around the Kesoram Rayon Factory at Tribeni, the effects of the poisonous gas on their bodies surface soon enough. Coughing, retching, the suffocated victims run futilely out of their homes in search of fresh air. For about 20 years now, the factory, situated some 60 km from Calcutta, has been spewing forth sulphur dioxide, sulphur trioxide and carbon disulphide gases into the air. But the villagers around have still not learned to live with it. "We have been fighting against the Kesoram factory management since 1961 to prevent their gases from destroying our lives," says Mritunjoy Chakraborty, among the first members of the Kesoram Rayon Gas Resistance Committee formed in 1965, and headmaster of the Ramnagar Primary School. Early next month, the villagers plan a massive rally in protest. Several environmentalists from Calcutta have been invited to participate.

So far their fight has got them nowhere. The factory began production in 1959, but the villagers were motivated to organise themselves only after a newspaper report on the effects of the gases emitted by the factory gave them warning. Mounting agitations, culminating in constant picketing of the factory in 1967, forced the factory management to promise the villagers that something would be done. Typically, nothing was done.

Villagers recall that last year they had invited the Left Front Government's Environment Minister Bhabani Mukherjee to visit the area and study the situation. The visit achieved nothing, nor has the state Environment Department been able to do anything. Curiously enough, the environment minister's son, Amit Mukherjee, has been given a job as a chemist in the factory.

Usually, the villagers organise a committee to lead their agitations. Not this year, though. Nemai Mondal, one of the villagers involved in the resistance movement, explains: "This year we have decided not to form any committee because in the past, committee members have been silenced by being employed in the factory." Informal groups led by young men from the worst affected villages — Raghunathpur, Ramnagar, Bispara, Gopalpur and Malirber — have taken over the agitation.

The factory manager does not deny that the factory does emit poisonous gases. In fact Singh in a letter to the Labour Department (No. KRSF 07/80 dated 19.8.80) states explicitly: "We have two sulphuric acid plants with a total capacity of 50 tonnes per day. During restarting, a huge quantity of sulphur dioxide and sulphur trioxide gases escape as stack gas which are not only losses in production, but they also pollute the atmosphere of the neighbourhood." To "control" the gas, the management has raised the heights of the chimneys. But this may not be enough. Gases are thus carried away from its immediate environs, but as Dr Rabin Chakraborty of the Calcutta University Science College says: "Sulphur dioxide being a heavy gas, it eventually settles down to ground level."



DILIP BANERJEE

The factory's stacks: harmful gas outlets

The long-term effect of the gases on the human constitution is disastrous. Sulphur dioxide irritates the respiratory system and repeated exposure to it leads to bronchitis and a host of other complications such as gastritis, lesser digestive troubles, and eventually coronary ailments. A local Employees State Insurance (ESI) physician from Raghunathpur, Dr Manik Bhattacharjee, says the incidence of asthma and tuberculosis is abnormally high among the local popul He says: "Many workers of the fac die early in life or become unable work." The effect of carbon disulphid even more harmful. It attacks the ner tissue to cause behavioural impairm including loss of sexual desire. The g harm the vegetation as well. "The flo on our mango trees are killed bamboo clumps don't give off shoots," laments Sarat Chandra Sa of the Chandrahati gram panchayat.

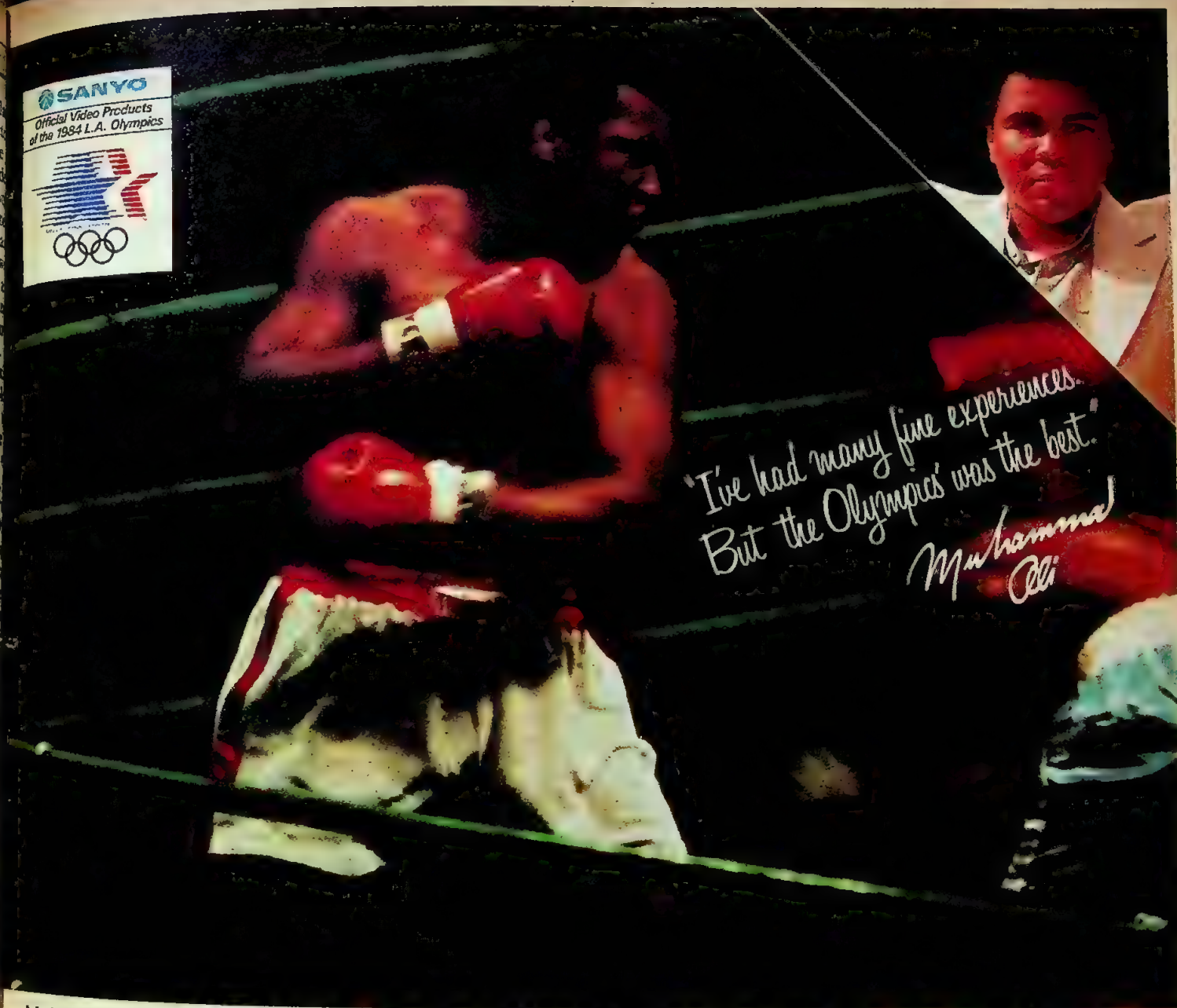
Singh admits a problem does ex "Carbon disulphide gas poses a prob sometimes when it bursts out of chamber in which it is produced, du high pressure. Recognising danger of such occurrences, assured the Chandrahati g panchayat in September 19 "We are trying our best to im ess upon the workers of our bon disulphide division to a to put back the rotary sc with a view to contol the bu up of high pressures in this tion as well the emission harmful gases. One of the sons for this has been the fre ent power trippings, which not only deteriorated the wo ing condition of this plant has also caused damage to electrical and other vital equ ment, leading to leakages."

These admissions are start enough, but the villagers have found thing encouraging about Singh's assu ce that such leakages of the gas are re Subon Ghosh, whose house is just nex the carbon disulphide plant, says he seen "great rushes of flames that occa nally shoot out from the plant". Si himself recalls an incident in 1982 wh the gas — which, apart from being to is highly explosive — blew out the saf valve, killing two workers.

Understandably, despite everythi nobody wants the factory shut do Says schoolteacher Meera Chakrabor "How can we demand the closure of factory when the livelihood of so many us depends on it?" Pollution cont equipment could minimise the harm effects of the gases, but it is expensive.

Singh does admit that the compa hasn't yet taken up a project to treat several thousand gallons of effluents dumps into the Hooghly every day. Wh effluents thus continue to pour into t water, the factory's smoke stacks foul the air around — and all plans to preve pollution merely gather dust in the co pany's files.

— INDRANIL BANER



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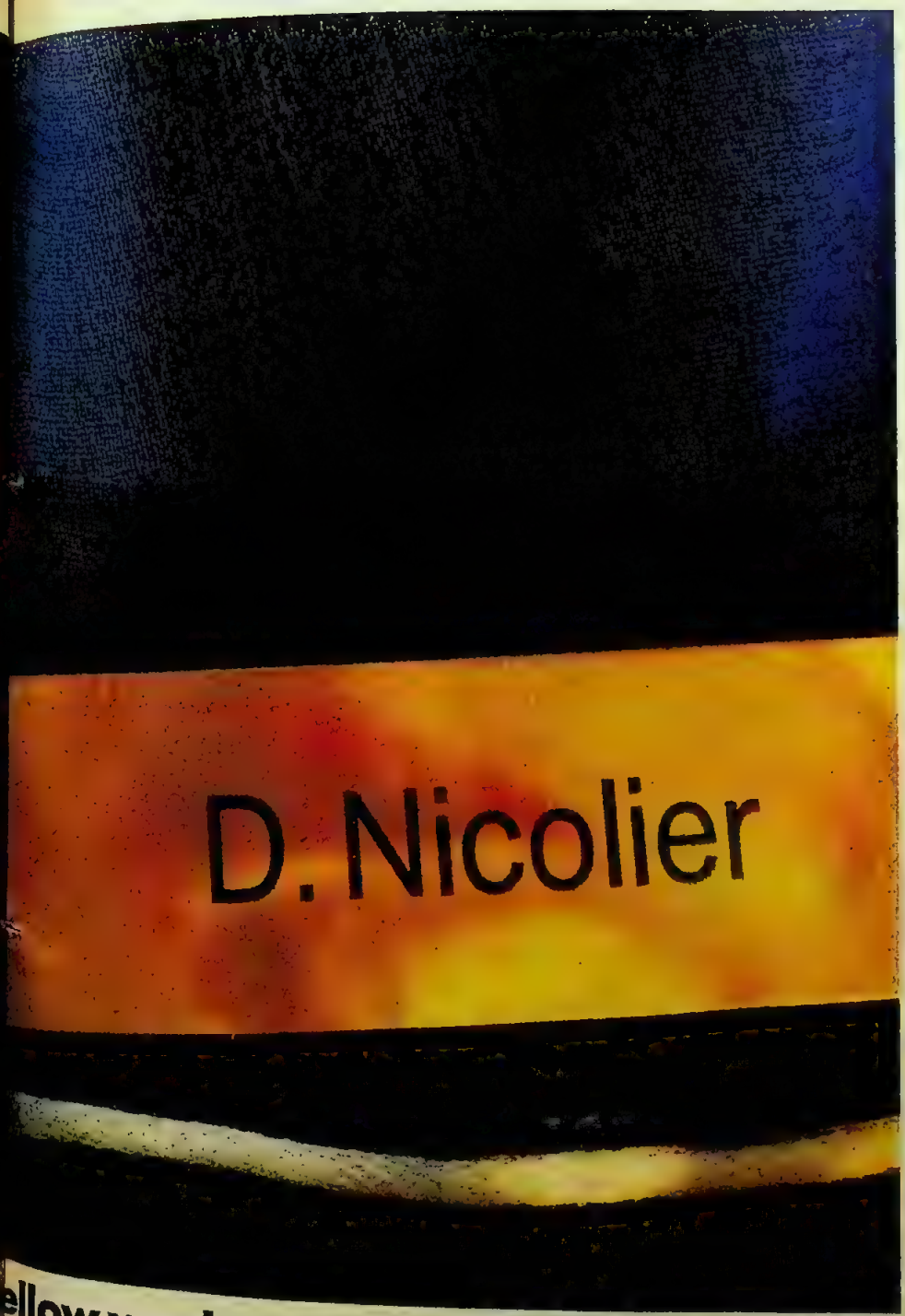


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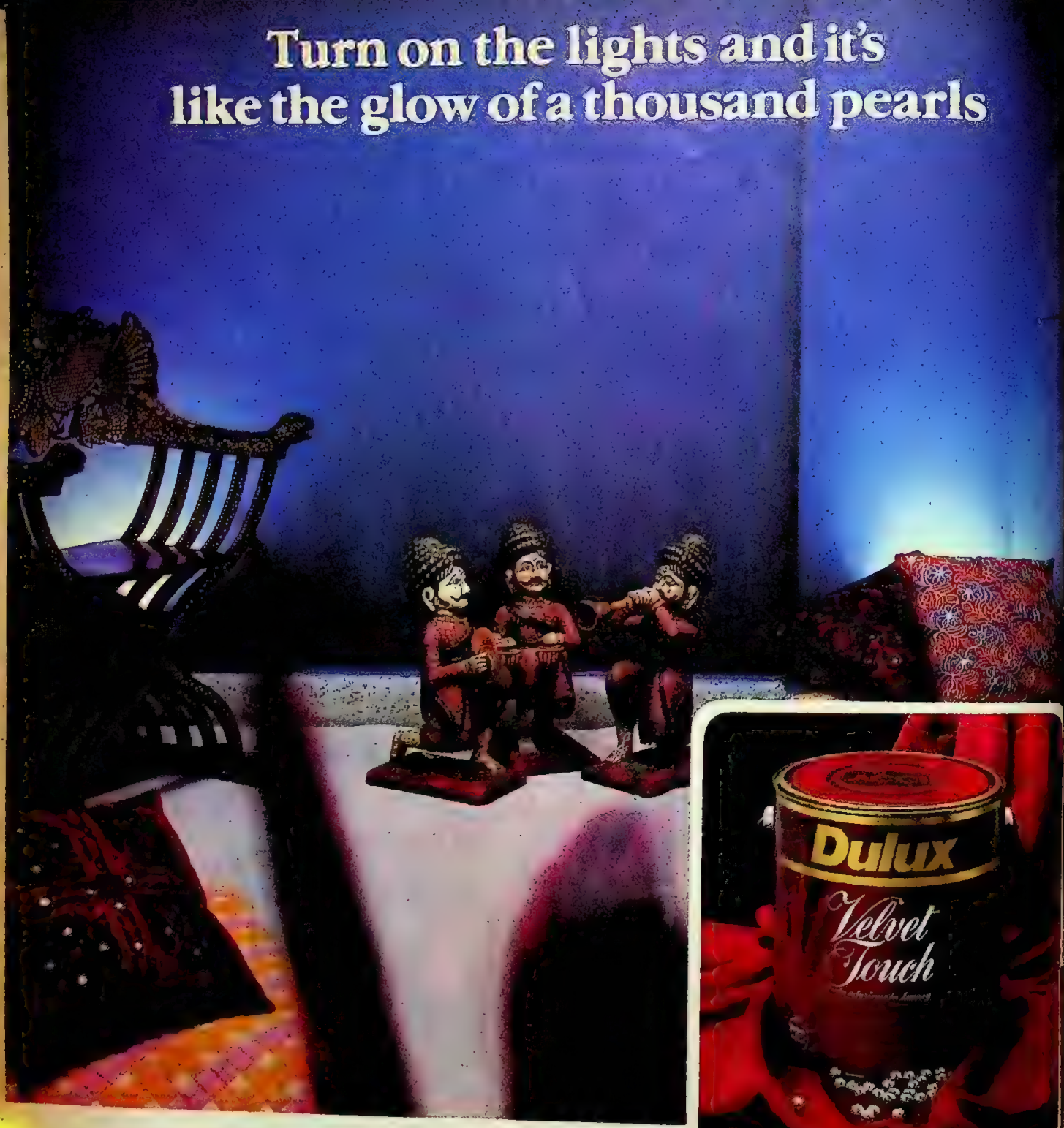


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Simple Story

HEESHAY KA GHAR
ODUCED BY: *Sundeep Kumar*
RECTED BY: *Amit Khanna*
ST: *Padmini Kolhapure, Raj Babbar,*
n Puri, Soni Razdan.

THE NICEST thing that has happened to Hindi cinema in the '80s is the steady blurring of the barriers hich defined where realism ended and ommercial promise began. Getting away om the stratification has helped restore modern version of the old-fashioned ocials" whose realism is convincing wiout being heavy-handed. Amit Khan-



Khanna with Babbar and Kolhapure in *Sheeshay Ka Ghar*: sensitive treatment

a's *Sheeshay Ka Ghar* is just such a film: n ordinary, tale of a marriage that flounders as the pulls of celebrity status leave a ouple with little time for each other.

It is its very ordinariness which akes *Sheeshay Ka Ghar* interesting. A ackneyed theme of marital incompatibity is given a fresh lease of life with Khana's deft handling. Set in Bombay's high-rofile art and music world, the film is eppered with a colourful mix of characers typical of the Prithvi Cafe atmosphere which pervades it. Clearly familiar with, and possibly a part of the arty crowd he is depicting, the director uses ithy conversations and snatches of cocktail party chatter effectively to push the arrative of two accomplished people rawing gradually apart.

Manjari Mansingh (Padmini Kolhaure) is a rich young singer with an eye for rt—and artists, as it happens—who is rawn towards the impecunious young rtist whose first exhibition she attends at he Prithvi Art Gallery. She buys a painting, setting the stage for her ultimate relationship with artist Nalin Nirula (Raj Babbar).

Even as their whirlwind romance progresses, Nalin shoots up in the lucrative Bombay art market. Manjari meanwhile has begun to make a name for herself as a classical singer. Soon after they are married, her first public recital wins her both critical acclaim and a substantial fan following.

The erosion of their initial euphoria is cleverly developed. Unable to bear the fact that it is his wife who is now the centre of attraction the artist draws gradually into himself. For Manjari this attitude is inexplicable, since she assumes that if he cared for her, Nalin would be pleased by her success. She is even more bewildered when the artist leaves her alone to have their baby while he sits in at his latest exhibition. The squabbles escalate, he spends much of his time drinking and she finally moves out with her daughter. For his ending Khanna succumbs to the pressures of the box-office and in a predictably weak sequence the couple are brought together when their daughter is kidnapped.

But it is the little touches and Khanna's sensitive handling of his artistes rather than the narrative that really make the movie. Although the film suffers from some of the obvious faults of a first directorial venture, particularly over-simplification and a tendency to stress cinematic technique rather than substance, *Sheeshay Ka Ghar* succeeds admirably in its aim: telling a simple story simply and without pretension. It is a satisfying addition to Bombay's new genre of Hindi entertainers.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH



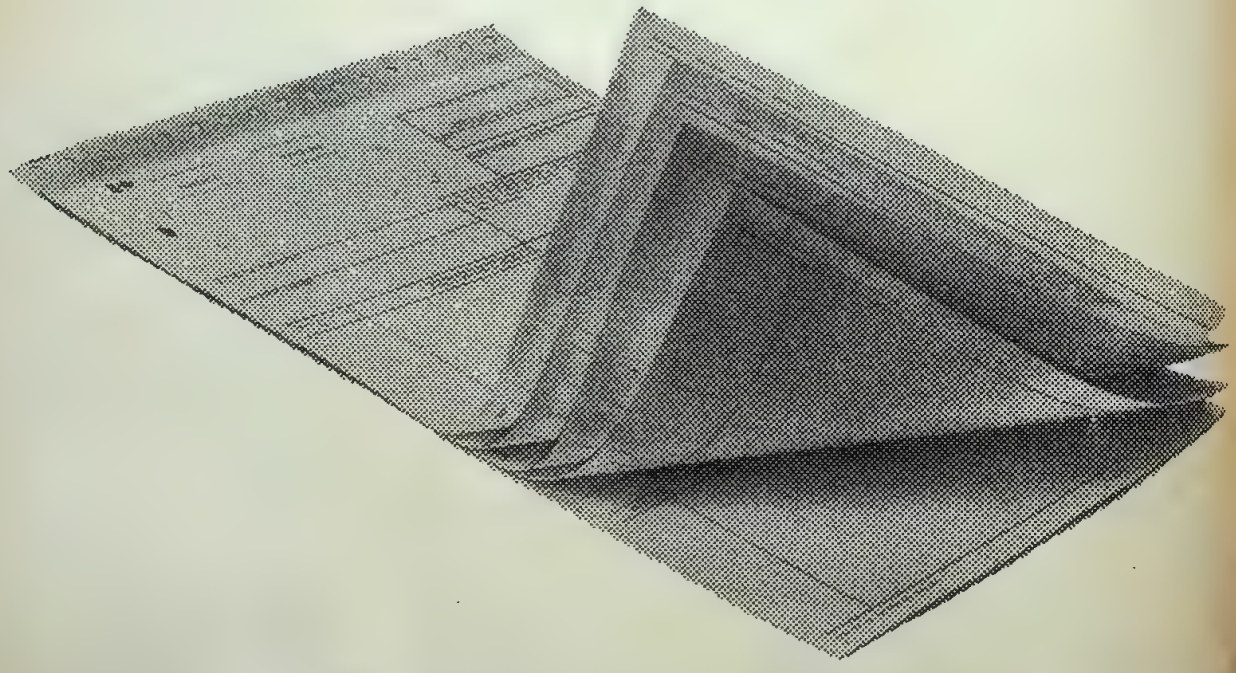
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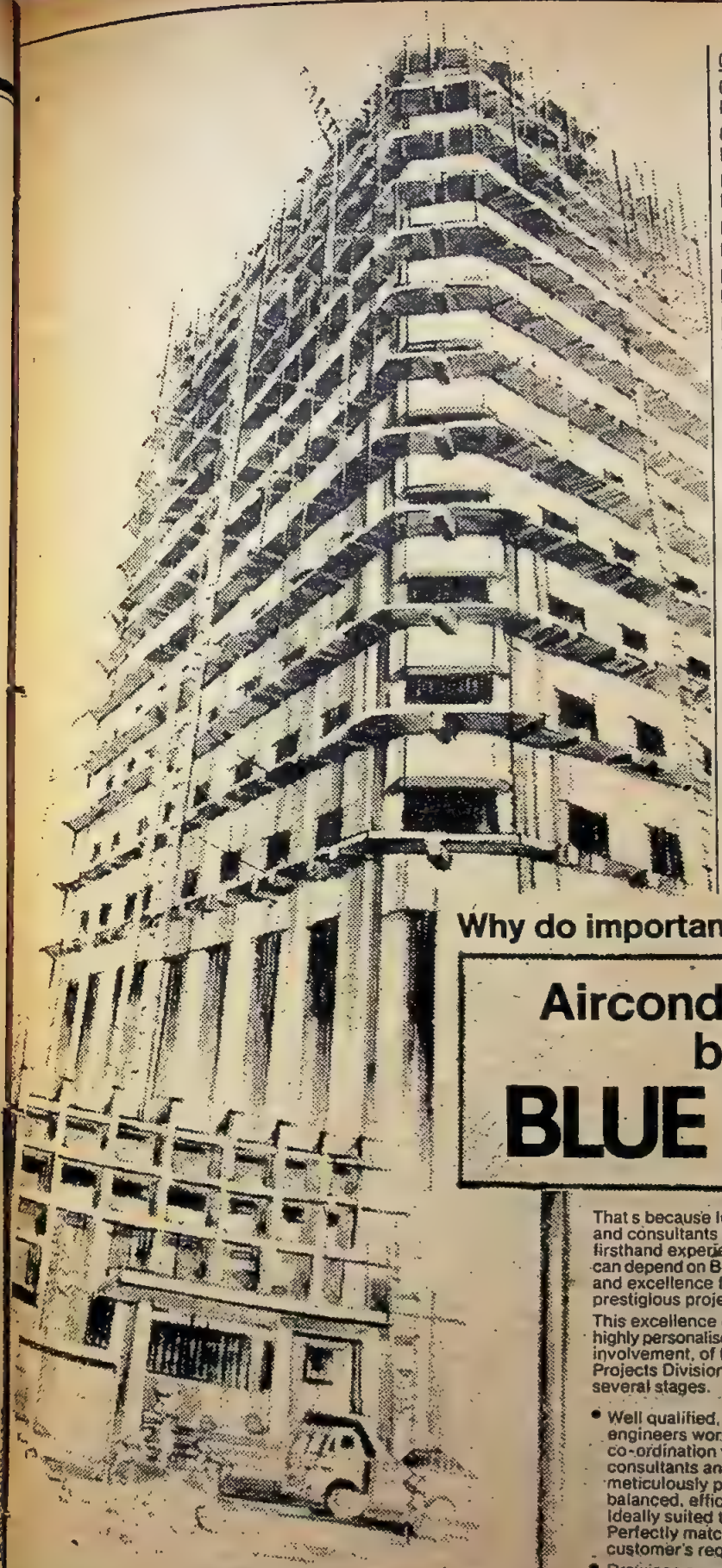
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Empire Building

STONES OF EMPIRE
by JAN MORRIS and SIMON WINCHESTER
Oxford University Press, 1983
Pages: 220; Price: Rs 210



MURIEL Tapworth had always found it difficult to cope with the rigours of English country life. When her husband went out for shooting or billiards, she would stop in for tea with Lady Wentworth; when visitors called upon her, she would spend the evening hours in the garden, walking with them along its herbaceous borders, admiring pansies and larkspur. For supper, when her husband returned, the Tapworths wore their best clothes and dined in state in the Great Dining Hall. There, the sideboard loaded with pheasant and boiled cabbage, two servants waiting in livery, the scene had all the appearance of true hospitality—a fine English couple joined together in a spirit of gastronomical elegance.

How then could such a memsahib from Devonshire—stuck for years between potted pansies and silver tea services—ever reconcile to the dusty plains of Jabbalpore, to its naked brown natives and sweltering summers? How could an upper class woman of such refinement, elegance and taste ever cope with that chaotic jumble they called 'Inja'?

As Jan Morris says, in *Stones of Empire*, Muriel was never to adjust. Unlike the Moghuls, the English culture of which she was a part, was not meant to assimilate and rule, but to dominate and rule. And everything about it was designed to make clear to the natives that here were a chosen people—different, God-like—with remarkable capacities to administer and control a lesser lot.

In *Stones of Empire*, a profusely illustrated architectural tour of bungalows and clubs, court-houses and cantonments, hill stations and railway stations, Morris describes not only the mind that conceived these buildings, built and used them, but does so in a style at once readable and profound, provocative and whimsical. "Not since the Romans," says Morris, "had an imperial people erected such a grand range of structures in a subject land. They expressed the will of a people not simply to rule, evangelise, or exploit another, but to adapt itself to utterly alien circumstances, landscapes altogether unlike its own, a climate unfamiliar and demanding, against which it must compete both for imperial effect and its own survival."

Imperial effect and survival—two attitudes whose incompatibility was clear in the life-style of the British in India and its resulting architecture. Imperial effect demanded grand buildings, classical in style, aloof and remote from the structure of a subject people. Survival demanded an architecture of adjustment and assimilation, buildings adapted both to the culture and to the climate. For the two obviously incongruous requirements [illegible] chitecture had to be at once grand subservient, detached as well as attac The result, as Morris points out, montage, a pastische. A people of cal white origins "got browner, lo thinner or sometimes more thicker" architectural styles, of classical Greek gin, "got cruder, looser, wider and larger". The constructions, as M says, were "roughened by their se and few buildings could remain gether immune to the environment"

But it was the bungalow that become the true symbol of the Briti India. No other building could as sum up the spirit of the imperial ente se. The bungalow was designed to the best of things, the best of imperi and the best also of its hostile setting Muriel Tapworth tried desperately to intain a life-style of distinction, ke the imperial dream alive by watering geraniums, polishing the silver tea ces and entertaining other white me hibs like herself. John Tapworth, not pursuing the cause of empire w the Gymkhana Club, taking sundow in its verandahs, playing billiards bridge in its Georgian ambiance.

The Madras High Court wa great building that was like a Pir Jail—court after court, staircase staircase, warrens of arc and vaulted corridors, half den alcoves where the law gossiped, huge veran thronged with litigants, galleries in whose cavities e dicants and holy men rep on public holidays, palatial *te-cocheres* beneath wh shade the omnipotent judg the Raj stepped from their riages to walk through glo cavernous halls, to their ro chambers and portic judgement rooms".

Jan Morris' descrip may verge on the picture but they are never wordy. style of writing is cynical also full of comment and b thy criticism. She question motives of the empire, afraid to raise doubts about colonial mentality nor ques the relevance of its architectu endeavours. Her book may of little academic value, but for these very reasons that an important work. For it tempts to look at building compassionate, talking,

Dalhousie Barracks in Fort William, Calcutta: imperial effect



...rarlisms, conveying not simply the dry ...tails of construction but the real rea... ...ns for their being.

In the end, says Morris, "the memsa... ...s in their bungalows, homesick and ...strated, may have felt they were per... ...rming God's will beneath the punkhas, ...t the British empire had lost its assu... ...ce. Tragedy had saddened it, the too ...avy a burden had weakened its will". ...r New Delhi, the last and most im... ...ssive construction of the Raj was no... ...ng but a mish-mash of hybrids. Its new ...vernment buildings favoured a Grae... ...-Moghul style. Sharp Moghul cornices ...d roof pavilions found their position ... classically proportioned facades, ...one elephants and bells capped a Doric ...lumn. Even the location of the vice... ...y's house seemed to suggest an autho... ...y moving silently into the background. ...mehow, that feeling of tentativeness, ...e uncertainty of the future was unwit... ...gly translated into the architecture. ...e Raj was clearly on its way out.

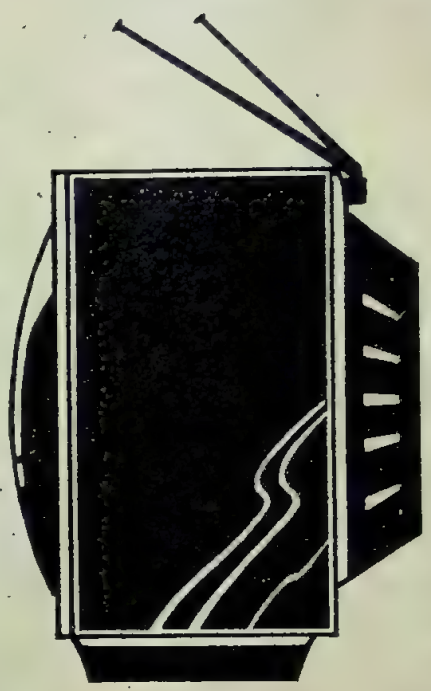
Architectural text is almost always ...companied by photographs: in this ...se however, Morris' prose is so evoca... ...e, so complete by itself that illustra... ...ns would only detract from it. But pho... ...grapher Simon Winchester's eye for the ...nic contrast adds yet another dimen... ...n to the book. A picture of Bombay's ... Thomas Cathedral, for instance, is ...ant to illustrate a gothic window but ...mehow Winchester's focus is on the ...nstruction worker sleeping under it. In ...nother, the classical facade of the Civil ...rvice Building in Calcutta is viewed ...om the perspective of dhobis washing ...thes in the foreground.

But as soon as the last memsahib ...ked out of her bungalow, the pucca ...hib out of his Gymkhana Club; when ...e imperial machinery turned off the ...unkhas in their bureaucratic hide-outs, ...dependent India stopped dead in its ...acks. Lost and without direction, it ...reaked back into the abandoned bunga... ...ws, into the exclusive clubs and an even ...ore formidable machinery turned on ...e punkhas of bureaucracy.

The new Indian was fiercely inde... ...endent. He manufactured a discarded ...itish model car and called it the Hin... ...ustan. He travelled to the hills to escape ...e sweltering Indian summers. In his ...are time, he talked of sticky wickets and ...lly-mid-ons. His children wore knickers, ...cked lollies and learnt of Shakespeare in ...enior Cambridge schools. As a new ...reed shook off the shackles of empire, ...ho could ever guess that the British were ...er in India?

—GAUTAM BHATIA

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DU 601



Raman Kairon: fair success

■ What happens to the descendants of political VIPs who have faded away from the scene? Sometimes they win beauty contests. In last fortnight's Miss India contest held by *Femina*, pretty **Raman Kairon** of Amritsar caught the eye of the judges. The granddaughter of the powerful and controversial former chief minister of Punjab, the late Pratap Singh Kairon, Raman was adjudged second runner-up. The fact that she didn't quite make it to the top didn't diminish her enthusiasm, though. "This is the most wonderful day of my life. I'm really thrilled," she said sincerely, if unoriginally. Equally thrilled, papa Gurinder Kairon, an industrialist, took her and his wife off on a tour of Australia to celebrate.

■ Modern dance forms are alive and well in India. That's the message Bombay-based maestro **Astad Deboo**, and Delhi's **Bharat Sharma** will convey at the 50th American Dance Festival inaugurated last fortnight in North Carolina by US first lady Nancy Reagan. For the two Indians, who will perform a little later at the six-week-long festival, this is a rare honour—they are the only two soloists invited from all over the world.

Deboo, has been dancing for around 20 years, winning admirers in almost every continent with his electrifying celebration of human grace and beauty. For the younger Sharma, 27, son of choreographer Narendra Sharma whose Bhoomika Dance Theatre has been popularising contemporary trends in Indian dance since 1973, it is like coming of age. "I am really excited. This is an indication that I have been recognised on a professional plane," he enthused.

■ For almost 12 years, **Rajiv Patel** has been brooding over a blow to his family pride—and finally this year, he vindicated his honour without spilling a drop of blood. Patel, 25, is an insurance agent from Bombay who created a record by selling policies worth a stupendous Rs 6.8 crore last year. More important for him, in one swoop he beat the previous record by an amazing Rs 2.29 crore, and avenged himself. Exulted Patel: "Mr Sharma of Haldwani in Uttar Pradesh who set the last record had done so by breaking my father's record set in 1972, and I was determined to bring honour back into the family." In the bargain, he is almost Rs 5 lakh richer.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Shah and Patel: winning policy

Another man who has most profitably advocated insurance policies is LIC development officer **Madhu Shah** who brought in business worth Rs 4.93 crore last year—another all-time high. "In this kind of race to create a record," explains the stocky officer, "it is the prestige that matters." Both Shah and Patel put in a gruelling 18 hours of work each day. For his pains, Patel is now qualified to attend the exclusive Million Dollar Round Table, a yearly conference of insurance agents from all over the world to be held in New York late this month. Who says hard work is a bad policy?

■ "The difference bet film making in Holly and India is like the diffe between steak and cu That's Los Angeles-b Indian film maker Kris **Shah** at his wittiest. Shah, perpetrated the disast *Shalimar* on the unsuspe Indian masses a few years is also known in his m country for *Cinema Cine* sensitively put-together re spective on Indian films time the debonair UCLA duate was back on h ground to celebrate the s cess of his *Hard Rock Z* —a horror comedy in the deo-rock tradition, evid inspired by Michael Jacks Grammy-winning *Thri* The film was screened at recent Cannes film fest where it met with "incred response," Shah crowed.

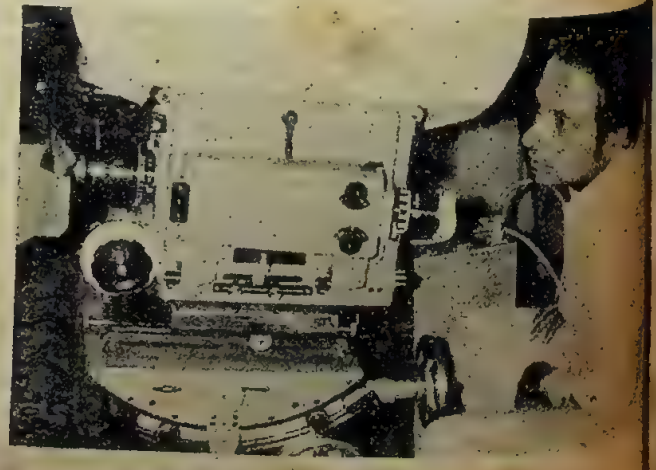
But Shah had a bon pick, too "I feel enraged th can't show my own films in dia," he complained—with reason: his *Rivals* and *The River Niger* received cal acclaim in the US. Indian distributors are over-eager to buy his kind films. That's not stopp him, though. Back in the U Shah is busy cashing in on video-rock revolution with youth-oriented *A Night in Drive-In* slated for a summ release. If nothing else, Sh certainly deserves credit exploiting his self-confes "American sensibilities" their fullest.

O P SHARMA

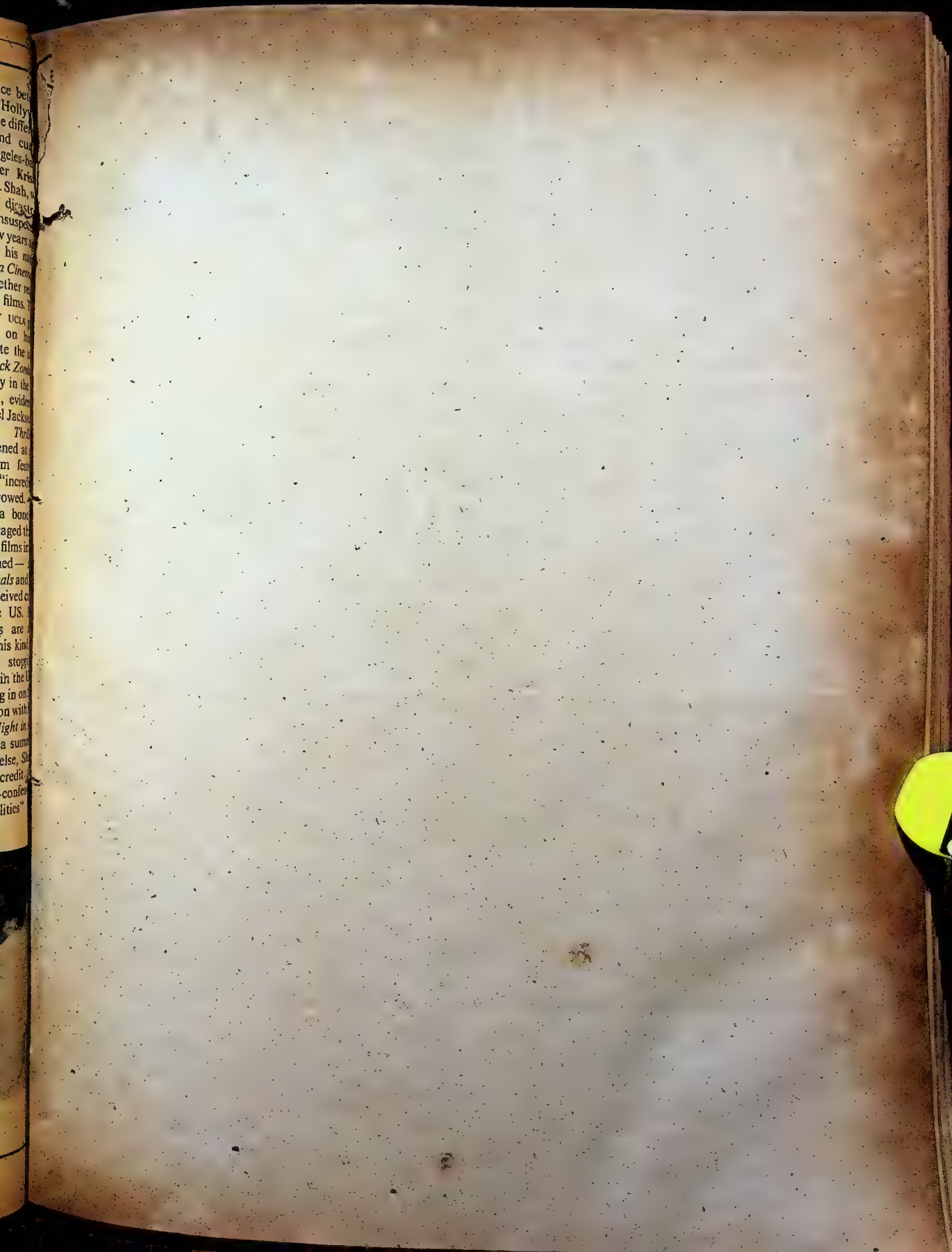




Bharat Sharma (left) and Astad Deboo: a rare honour



Krishna Shah: moving with the times



2076

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Groping in the Dark

Another sweltering summer is about to pass; not, unfortunately, the power crisis, which continues to disrupt lives, halt growth, damage equipment, make normal life impossible. A look at the causes, and possible solutions.

COVER STORY 74



State of Uncertainty

Three weeks after the launching of Operation Bluestar terrorism was refusing to die out in Punjab. On the political front activity had begun and the Government had decided to raise yet another armed force to tackle terrorism.

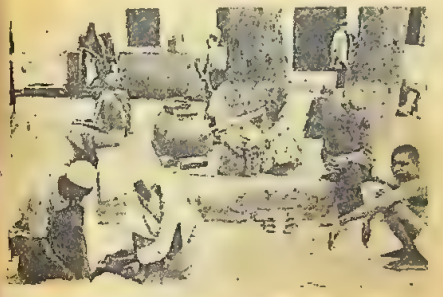
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"Pakistan is not involved"

Reports of Pakistan's complicity in the Sikh terrorist agitation in Punjab have resulted in protests from Islamabad. Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haq defends his country's stand in an exclusive interview, with comments on wide-ranging issues.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 68



Dungeons of Doom

Delhi's beggars' homes are grim testimony of negligence. Not only do they lack adequate facilities but overzealous authorities are rounding up innocent people as beggars, some of whom have died of malnutrition and gross neglect.

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A Head-on Collision

The collision at Delhi's Rail Bhavan between Railway Minister Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Minister of State Jaffer Sharief has created a storm over the subject of Chowdhury pampering his Malda constituency at public expense.

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Lessons of Change

Cramming is the key word to success in schools. But in Madhya Pradesh's middle schools, learning has acquired new meaning with a science teaching programme aimed more at letting children experiment rather than cram.

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Cover photograph by BHAWAN SINGH

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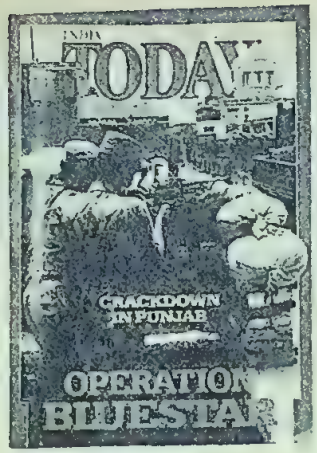
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STATE OF AGONY

The cover story was an extraordinary, lucid and human reporting of the disturbing but inevitable army action in Punjab ("Operation Bluestar", June 30). Your correspondent has very rightly maintained that the Sikh community's initial feelings of outrage and smouldering helplessness need to be soothed by a benevolent political leader.

Meerut RASHMEE R.LALL

■ With the army's action and the death of Bhindranwale the Hindus felt relieved and victorious. On the other hand the Sikhs not only assailed the act but condemned it outright. It was not an attack on the Sikhs as many believe but an attack on the extremists. It should not be considered a defeat or a victory. One should try and bridge the gap that is fast widening between the Sikhs and the Hindus.

Chandigarh BHUPINDER B. SINGH

■ The ill-fated army action was at this stage inevitable, but it could have been avoided had the crack-down on the rising extremism been earlier. The action was delayed, probably for some political gains.

Sopepat R.S. SANDHU

■ Khushwant Singh's returning the Padma Bhushan came as a shock. It was not expected from a person who understands the right and the wrong and does not base his actions on religious fanaticism. If he felt so strongly about the army entering the Golden Temple then why did he not resign from his Rajya Sabha seat which gives him so many facilities. He should have really returned the honour when the extremists were collecting arms and ammunition in the temple and were killing innocent people all over Punjab. Was the sanctity of the temple not destroyed then?

Chandigarh P.S. SANDH

THE SWRAJ SAGA

The Government is only indulging in the time-tested adage, (June 30). It is robbing H. Peter Nanda to pay S. Paul. What else can you expect from a government that abolished the privy purses and ICS retirement benefits.

Gorakhpur ARUN KHA

WIMPY'S PLAN

Reference "Chain Reaction" (Trade Winds, June 30), your statement mentioning equity participation by a top civil servant in the Ministry of External Affairs is wrong. There is no financial participation by any civil servant in our group of companies.

Also, Wimpy Foods is not opening parlours in Delhi. It is in fact opening a food processing plant to supply our parlours. Wimpy India Pvt Ltd is the company which has signed the agreement with Wimpy International, UK.

S. BHANDA

Bombay *director Wimpy India Pvt L*

The error is regretted. —*Edito*

THE GLORIOUS PAST

The cover story on Jawahar Nehru (June 15) was an eye-opener, fo the new generation believes that politicians and corruption are synonymous.

Calcutta SUDHAKAR MISH

■ The write-up on Nehru was a well researched piece, reconstructing his architectural skills in building the nation. I agree with you that "if his legacy is a troubled one . . . it is because of those who have inherited it".

Gandhinagar MANOJ OZ

■ It appears that the fall in moral political standards in the Congress now is because of the cutting off of the regional roots of the party and infusing a personality cult. Maybe this policy is useful for those in power but is proving to be harmful for the party and the country.

Sonepat RAVI SANDH

COMMUNAL TENSION

The article "Nightmare at Noon (June 15) gives a precise and apposite summary of the sanguinary events that took place at Bhiwandi. The intervie

with Bal Thackeray proves that an idle mind is a devil's workshop. He has time to give interviews, answer telephones and make statements but does not have the time to count or find out the number of dead or those in hospital. He calls himself the commander-in-chief!

AKHTAR H.LODGHAR
Madras

■ G.M. Banatwalla's statement that "permission for a Shiv Jayanti procession in Bhiwandi was a wrong act", was shocking. If majority alone is the criterion, then in other parts of India no non-Hindu festival should be celebrated.

SUVARCHALA
Hyderabad

PROGRESS PARADOX

Referring to the Comment "The Technology Tussle" (June 15) if India is to grasp the implications of the technology race it must undertake a massive campaign to inculcate scientific consciousness amongst the youth. They should be exposed to science at a very early age and emphasis should be on teaching them the know how of computers.

KAMAL WADHWA
New Delhi

■ "The Technology Tussle" is like asking the poor to eat cake when they do not even have bread. Of India's 700 million hardly one million have access to technological progress and far less benefit from technology import.

S.J. THOMAS
Patna

WHAT PRICE NEWS?

It is amusing to read your report on newsprint ("The Paper Chase", June 15) that the tycoons of the newspaper industry have decided to increase the price of newspapers. The excuse dished out is the oft-repeated bogey of newsprint shortage whereas none of them have had to suspend their publications or cut down on the number of pages of their editions. They have never passed on the benefit to the readers when during the last two years the newsprint was available to them at cheaper prices. Why should the reader share the increase in their input costs?

R.NARAYAN MOORTHY
New Delhi

CORRECTION

In the cover story on Punjab (June 30) the reference to army desertions at Sriganganagar had inadvertently mentioned 9 Sikh Light Infantry. The reference was actually to 9 Sikh Regiment.

— Editor

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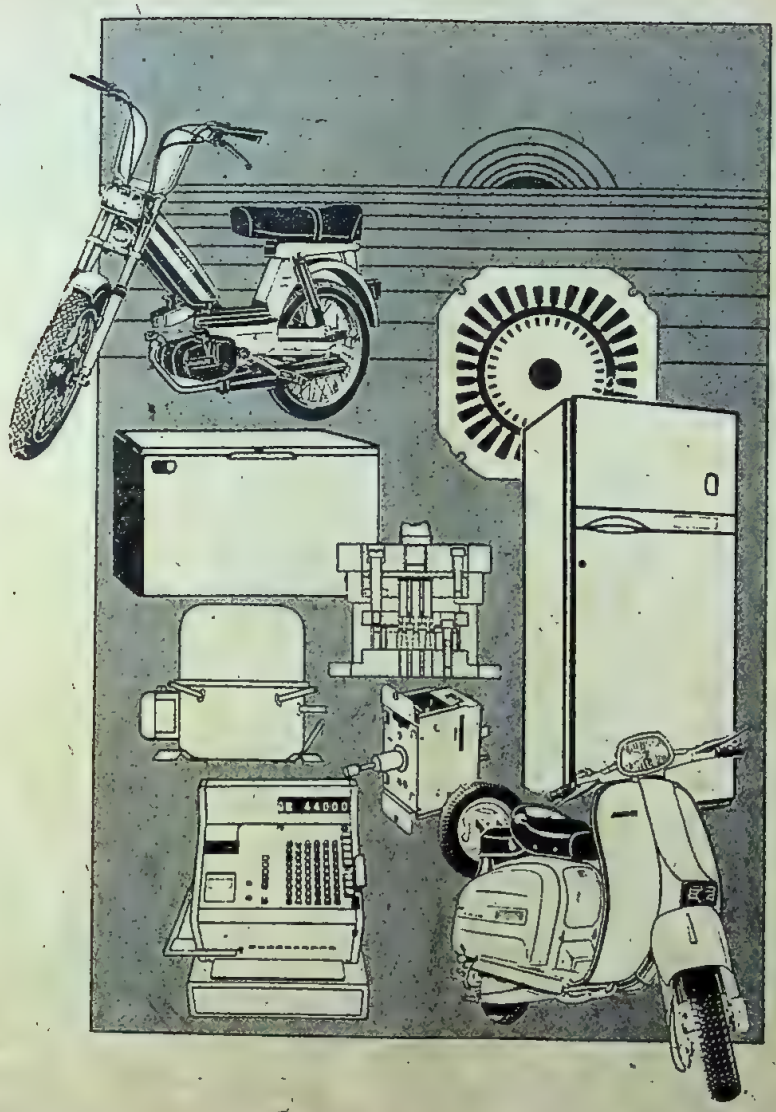
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THE SCATTERED and isolated cries for Khalistan that have gone up in Punjab and abroad, coupled with the more general alienation felt by large numbers of Sikhs after the army action in the Golden Temple complex, have once again raised fears about the unity of the country coming under threat. While it is true that an entirely avoidable problem exists now where none did four years ago, there is equally a danger in blowing the crisis out of proportion. The country has dealt with similar problems before, and should be able to do so again.

Nation-building is a difficult business, and at various times and in various parts of the country, religious, regional, linguistic and ethnic communities have raised banners of protest. There have been armed insurgencies in Nagaland and Mizoram, mildly secessionist movements in the erstwhile Madras province, and a constant problem of alienation in Kashmir. Some of these are only to be expected when a traditional, segmented society goes through a process of integration and modernisation. And the significant fact is that most of the deviant elements have been adopted by and co-opted into the country's flexible democratic system.

Those who saw latent threats to national unity in these sectarian movements have proved to be false prophets. The Government was also able to quell the Naxalite upsurge in Calcutta and elsewhere, a problem that once caused as much concern then as the Punjab situation does now. The once separatist political parties in Tamil Nadu are now an integral part of the national democratic picture. The rebel Mizo leader Laldenga has offered to negotiate a political settlement within the frontiers of the Constitution. In Nagaland, the influence of A.Z. Phizo has been diminishing.

Indeed, the broad forces of national unity today are far greater than they have ever been. The country has become a common market, there are powerful and effective all-India institutions, services and elites that are committed to maintaining national unity, and finally strong, effective and highly professionalised armed forces which will guard against external threats and also internal subversion. In Punjab itself, there are strong reasons why there should be no divide. Farmers in the state need the national market for their food; some 40 per cent of the Sikhs live outside the state; the community has strong and traditional links with the Hindus, and there is clearly no oppression of Sikhs who enjoy economic prosperity and religious freedom. Whatever the hotheads or disgruntled elements might say, the overwhelming interest of the Sikh community clearly lies in staying within the Indian Union.

In one sense, secessionist slogans are nothing but bargaining postures, or methods of communicating a message of protest. The cry for Sikh separatism should be understood for what it is, and isn't. It is, at one level, an effort to prevent the Sikh identity from being submerged in the surrounding Hindu majority, particularly when Sikh men start giving up the external symbols of their religion. At another level, it was initially a bid by one political party to wrest the initiative from another. And at a third, there is the combination of religious and economic demands, none of which adds up to secession.

HOWEVER, in the aftermath of the army action in Amritsar and elsewhere, the general danger now is one of alienation. This can only grow if the army stays on in the state and takes on the character of an occupation force, as it has in parts of the North-east. The mental gulf could also grow if the communal divide that has been created between Sikhs and Hindus is not quickly bridged with the help of community leaders from both sides. Punjab, after all, is not the North-east. It is at the heart of the Indian economy and Indian politics, it is strategically vital, and it is difficult to control because Sikhs have a history of guerrilla activity going back to the 18th century.

The goals for the Government in the present situation must be the same as before. It must strengthen the hands of the moderate elements, give in where necessary, and fight the possibility of greater alienation. New Delhi may have to wait for a convincing Akali leadership to emerge but no time must be lost in getting back to the negotiating table lest the sheer delay create unfordable mental divides.

Some fundamental lessons must also be kept in mind. History shows that few states have broken up as a result of internal disorder and conflict, despite numerous "internal wars" in the last 40 years — in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria and the Congo. Older problems also exist, like that of the Basques in Spain or the Catholics in Northern Ireland. Despite strife and suffering, not one of these countries has broken up as a result of internal conflict. In spite of considerable international support, Biafra was not separated from Nigeria. In both the recent instances when a nation was dismembered — Bangladesh and Cyprus — it was because of decisive external intervention.

In India's immediate context, if the Government gives in too late today, it may have to give much more tomorrow. The reluctance of the Congress Party to share power with the Muslims in the 1930s contributed in no small way to the ultimate partition. Similarly, Islamabad's unwillingness to deal with the demands for regional autonomy led eventually to the creation of Bangladesh. In our own polity now, the cry for greater federalism may have to be seriously reckoned with in order to contain forces that might otherwise agitate for separatism.

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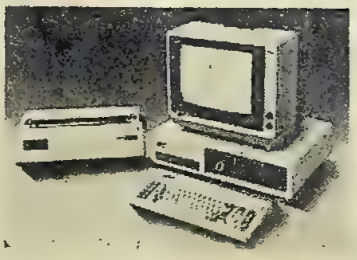
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• *Nehru knew nothing about rural India, whereas I did. I believed in Gandhi. He did not .... People like me with a dhoti on, a Gandhi cap on, he regarded as uncultured.*

■ CHARAN SINGH *in The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *I personally think he's (Atal Behari Vajpayee) the best man we have in the Opposition. The best man. And he has no son to groom.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI *in Debonair*

• *I am more popular now than when I was chief minister ... I am a great believer in free debate. That is why I withdrew the Press Bill.*

■ JAGANNATH MISHRA *in The Statesman*

• *I am not worried about the Centre. The Centre has not given me power, my people have given me power ... We are in conflict with the Congress(I).*

■ N.T.RAMA RAO *in The Sunday Observer*

• *Politicians are ineffective anyway, they may as well be good to look at .... I'd love to have Jayalalitha as the president of India! At least you have an attractive face to look at when you put up a picture in your office.*

■ NASEERUDDIN SHAH *in Femina*

• *She (Mrs Gandhi) struck me as being extraordinarily charming ... a person who carries herself with great dignity and impresses you ... (but) much of our ills today are on account of her ill-advised policies.*

■ LT-GEN. S.K.SINHA *in the Express Magazine*

• *I don't know how Maneka was able to hook Sanjay. She is easy with her speech but looks frigid as far as sex is concerned ... I somehow think that she's sexless.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH *in Imprint*

• *I've never read a book because I can't sit in one place for too long. I did try to go through a James Hadley Chase once. But it was so heavy, I got a headache. Just looking at a book gives me fever.*

■ SUNNY DEOL *in The Times of India*

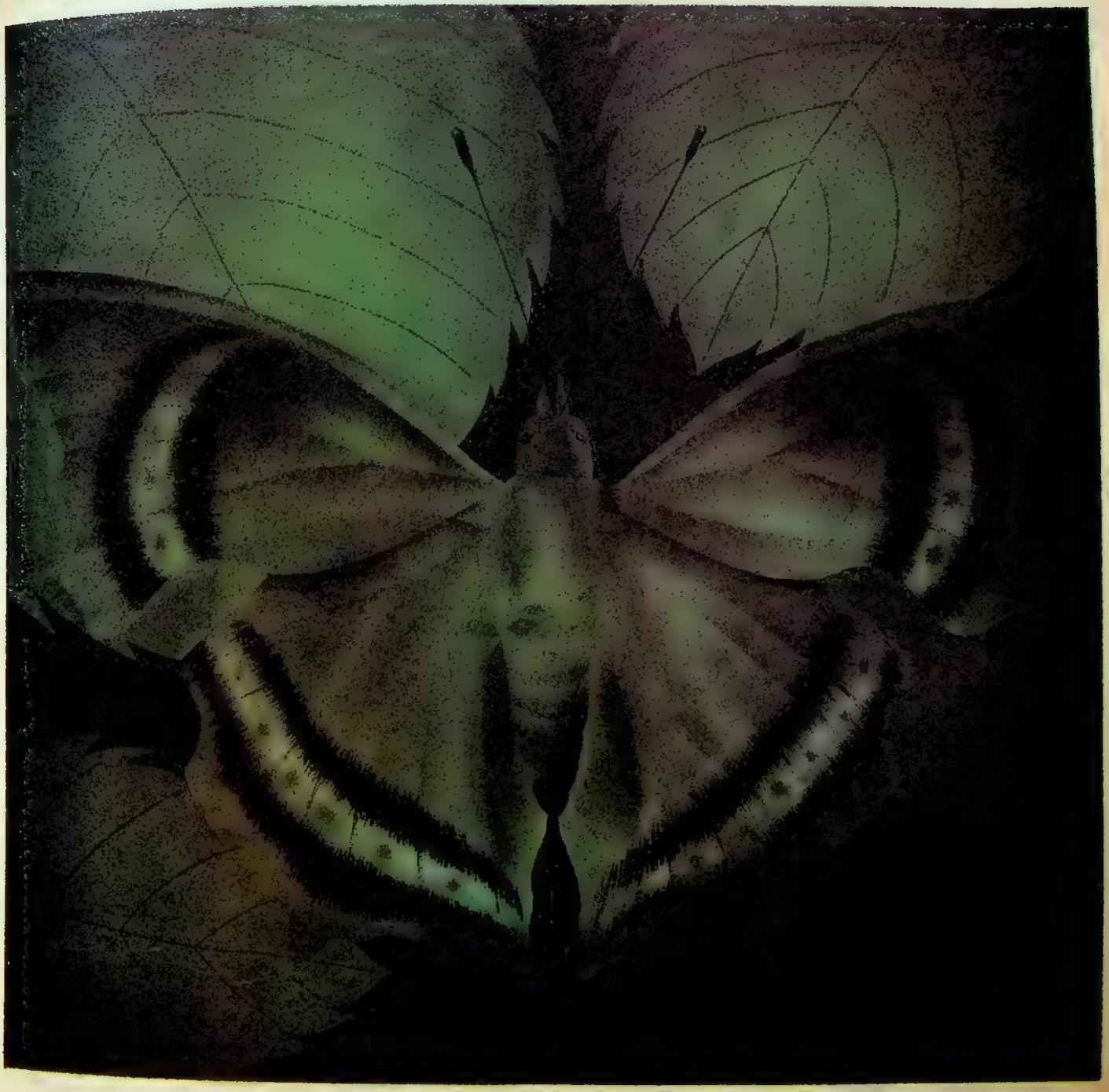
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WIRELESS WRATH

■ The police have their own wireless system for saying sweet nothings to each other and, occasionally, to inform all those concerned to nab the passing robber if they have the time. It appears, however, that down in the south in Madras some policemen are using this most private of networks to give vent to their feelings about a few selected people.



Take last fortnight. Just as a group of officers was about to beam out messages of command over the radio, a voice cut in on the air waves, screaming out the lucid if slightly out of context exhortation: "Down with MGR who distrusts police." As there are 300 microphones in the circuit, it was impossible to trace the person who had paid the tribute.

This was not the first time that people in high places had thus received compliments. Once, when Jayalalitha was on one of her tours through Tamil Nadu, a superintendent was shocked out of his wits when he heard a voice telling him that he was just an errand boy for the lady. The officer screamed back and a slanging match went on for some time until somebody switched to another frequency because smoke was seen coming out of the case.

BOTTLE OF WITS

■ Nobody, but nobody, lets them boozers booze in peace. At least, not in Imphal, where they've now gone and done a most dreadful thing. They've formed a sort of Amazonian Guard, composed of the deadlier of the species, which . . .

But that is anticipating. A possible scenario of the wee wee hours of the morning would go this way. A drunk, with the Pope's telephone numbers doing a dizzying war dance in his stomach with quite incredible effects on the brain, zigs, then zags, then zigs again down the main thoroughfare at 0159 hours. At 0200 hours, a marauding squad of the All-Manipur Women Social Reformation and Development Samaj tiptoes down the same thoroughfare. The bottle-mamas hold, in the manner of Viking warriors,



blazing torches in their hands and as the light from these torches illuminates the poor misled creature now wishing he could really get in touch with the Pope writhing in the dirt of the road, they pounce on him with eager cries and frogmarch him to the police station.

For anyone who wishes to avoid the bottle-mamas, their patrolling hours are from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. with no breaks for good conduct.

TO SIR WITH LOVE

■ There are hundreds of thousands of primary and secondary schools in India, and at least in one of them the students can be said to have a good time. This is the Wamka primary school in Bhachau, near Bhuj in Gujarat, which has about 165 students who when canvassed for their views on a change of scene said they



liked it here and would not like to go somewhere else in search of learning.

The reason for this unanimous display of devotion is not far to find. For one, the school has only one teacher, so that he often looks as if he is addressing a public meeting when he stands on a soap box and yells out the intricacies of the alphabet to a howling mob of children.

The other reason is that whenever this teacher goes on leave—which is frequent—his swollen flock go on forced leave as well, which adds up to quite a lot of holidays in one year. No wonder that, when the sarpanch of the village suggested to the proper authorities that at least one more teacher be sent to aid the sufferer, tiny voices were heard raised in firm disapproval.

MAILING MAYHEM

■ The Indian postal service is not among the worst in the world, and despite being one of the oldest services it can come up with some rather novel ideas as its employees demonstrated in Gorakhpur recently.

The postmen in one post office of the town were reportedly on strike and the gaps were filled in by a few people described as 'casual labour' who took their jobs, literally, casually.

They took the bundles of letters and cycled with them to an open space approximately in the geographical centre of the area for which the letters were meant. Then they dumped them on the pavement in convenient piles and roared out the Hindi equivalent of "Come and get it!" Hundreds of house-



holders, receiving this green signal, jumped onto the piles, battering each other in their effort to sift the heaps and get to their letters first. It took a while for the piles to be sorted in this do-it-yourself melée, and at the end of it all the casual labour picked up the remaining mauled missives lying here and there and cycled nonchalantly away.

–Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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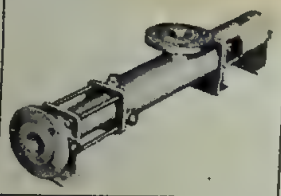
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'WNA' SERIES VISCO SINGLE SCREW PUMP



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Typical Applications:
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Material : Mild Steel/ Stainless Steel
Capacity : 48 M^3/hr. max.
Pressure : 12 Bar max



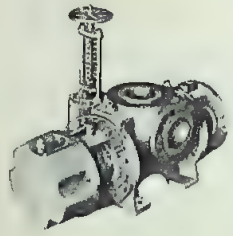
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Material : Cast Iron, Steel/ Stainless Steel
Capacity : 400 M^3/hr max.
Pressure : 42 Bar max



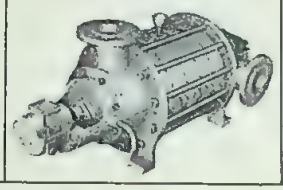
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Typical Applications:
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Material : Cast Iron, G.M., Stainless Steel
Capacity : 240 M^3/hr max
Pressure : 40 Bar max



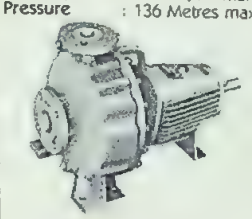
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Pressure : 136 Metres max



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Typical Applications:
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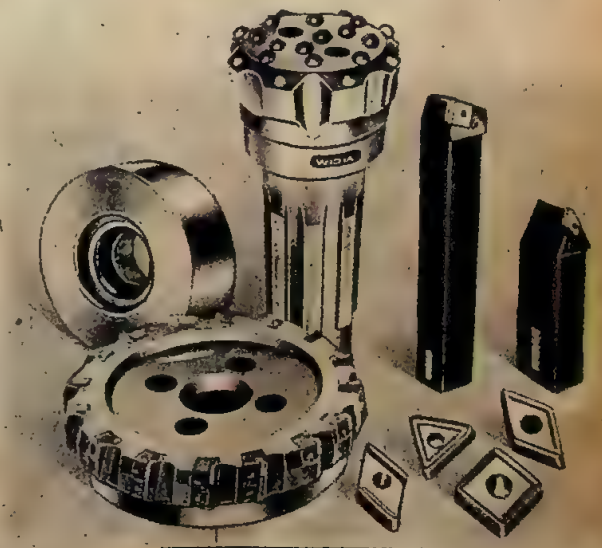


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PUNJAB

A State of Uncertainty



EVEN in the beleaguered city of Amritsar, there was a ray of elation last fortnight. On a wind-swept Monday morning, there was no stopping the men, women and children, both Sikhs and Hindus, who came out in their thousands, jostling on the road connecting the brick-red Kotwali building with Jallianwala Bagh, which marks the beginning of what was till then the no-entry zone around the Golden Temple complex.

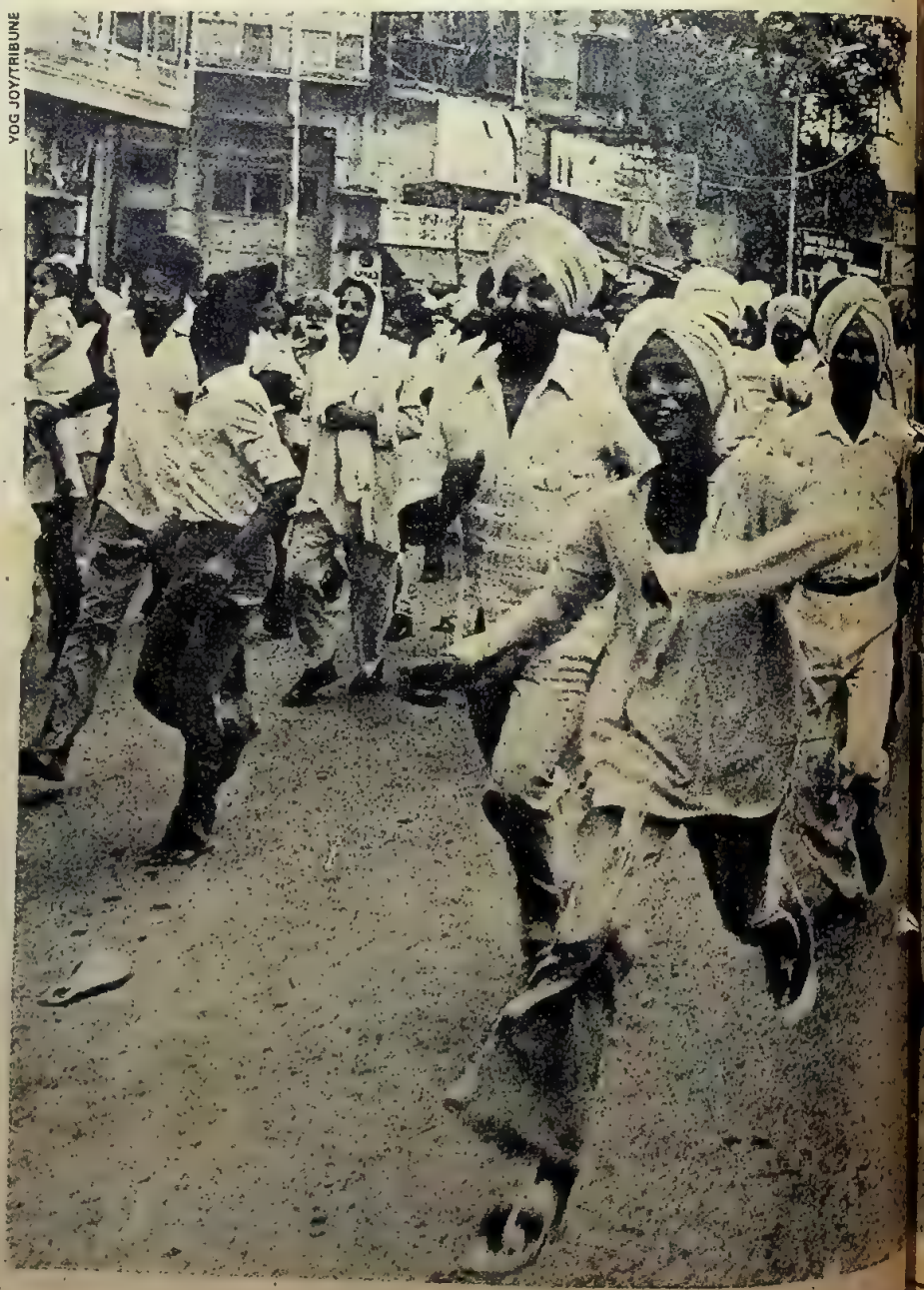
Troops clutched their carbines and rifles in a desperate bid to maintain a semblance of order. But the army and district administration officers soon accepted the *fait accompli* and relaxed their earlier decision to allow only a few hundred people to visit the temple after thorough screening. For a people confined indoor for days under curfew — hearing explosions, the rattle of gunfire and, worst of all, the rumours that suggested utter destruction of the holiest of their shrines — the moment of truth had come. And the joy showed on their faces.

But it was to be short-lived. As the first batches entered the battered temple complex, the smiles on their faces slowly vanished. Even though the army jawans had done a tremendous job of repairing the outer facade of the main entrance, patching up bullet holes and replacing shattered clocks, the scene inside gave ample indication of the intensity of fighting — a damaged *parikrama*, battered *serai* and *langar* buildings, the burnt out library and of course the heavily damaged Akal Takht.

There were elements of a poignant emotional reunion too as people sobbed while going down on their knees in obeisance. Hundreds went about picking bits of rubble from the debris or even bits of ash to take back tied in handkerchieves. So heavy was the rush that it took people up to an hour to inch past the narrow causeway connecting the temple with the *parikrama*. Many touched the golden facade of the temple in virtual disbelief and listened intently as army officers explained to them how the battle took place and pointed out spots from where the terrorists had fired at the troops.

At least on this day, there were no barriers of suspicion and hatred between the people and the jawans. The latter distributed cold water among the devotees and willingly conversed with the more inquisitive among them. An officer also pointed out to a bunch of visitors the marble plaque near the main entrance installed by Brigadier S.C. Puri, the officer shot by his mutinous recruits at Ramgarh in Bihar last month. He and the troops of the second battalion of the Sikh Regiment, which he had commanded in the battle of Pulkanjari near Amritsar in December 1971, had installed the plaque in the temple as a thanksgiving gesture. There could hardly have been a more eloquent reflection of the brutal irony that has enveloped Punjab in recent times.

As the crowds returned home, the smiles had disappeared. While men held their own, many women sobbed, even



YOG JOY/TRIBUNE

Joyful Sikhs rush toward the Golden Temple on the day it re-opened

cried aloud. Yet, though everyone was sad, the brief exposure had convinced them of the Government's claim that at least the Harmandir Sahib had remained more or less unscathed, barring a few bullet marks.

Indeed for the Government, the step turned into unintended publicity. Said a senior official at Chandigarh: "There is obviously a problem with allowing so many people to stream into the temple suddenly. Yet our experience last Sunday proved that, if anything, it is exposure like this that will help the Government control the fuse. After what has happened, people are bound to be angry and the only way of dealing with the situation now is slowly allowing them to know what happened rather than let them believe wild rumours." Later, however, the officials had decided to allow people inside in smaller batches as a large-scale influx, like the one on Monday, can lead to complications and, in any case, hamper the repair work of the jawans.

But though the repair is on in full swing, it is ironically just this that has angered Sikhs in Amritsar and elsewhere. Said Sardar Kesar Singh, 91, who spent 14 years in jail during the freedom struggle: "We suffered so much for the independence of the country which has destroyed the holiest of our shrines. And now they will not even let us maintain one of our most important traditions—that we build, clean and look after our shrines ourselves through *kar sewa* (voluntary labour). Let me tell you, even if the army goes ahead with the repairs it will be undone the moment the shrine is handed over to us. We reserve the right to do it all our own way." That it was not a hollow threat was obvious from the experience in Patiala where bullet marks on the gurudwara patched up by the army were dug out the moment the temple was handed over to the old management.



THE REPAIR and restoration of the temple complex is a complicated issue. In Delhi, a Sikh lawyer had already moved the Supreme Court seeking an injunction against the repair work by the Government. Similarly, the five head priests who, in the absence of the Akali leadership, are the only people speaking collectively on behalf of the Sikhs, have warned the Government against going ahead with the repairs. It is with this in mind that the Government has been trying to initiate some kind of contact with the head priests, other Sikh elders and religious and political leaders.

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Buta Singh has been assigned the job. His passage, so far, has been tedious and disheartening. He was snubbed quite violently by Baba Kharak Singh, the nonagenarian Sikh saint with a lifetime of *kar sewa* behind him. His efforts to woo the acting Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President Atma Singh too have failed. Last week, further complications arose with the sudden resignation of governor B.D. Pandey.

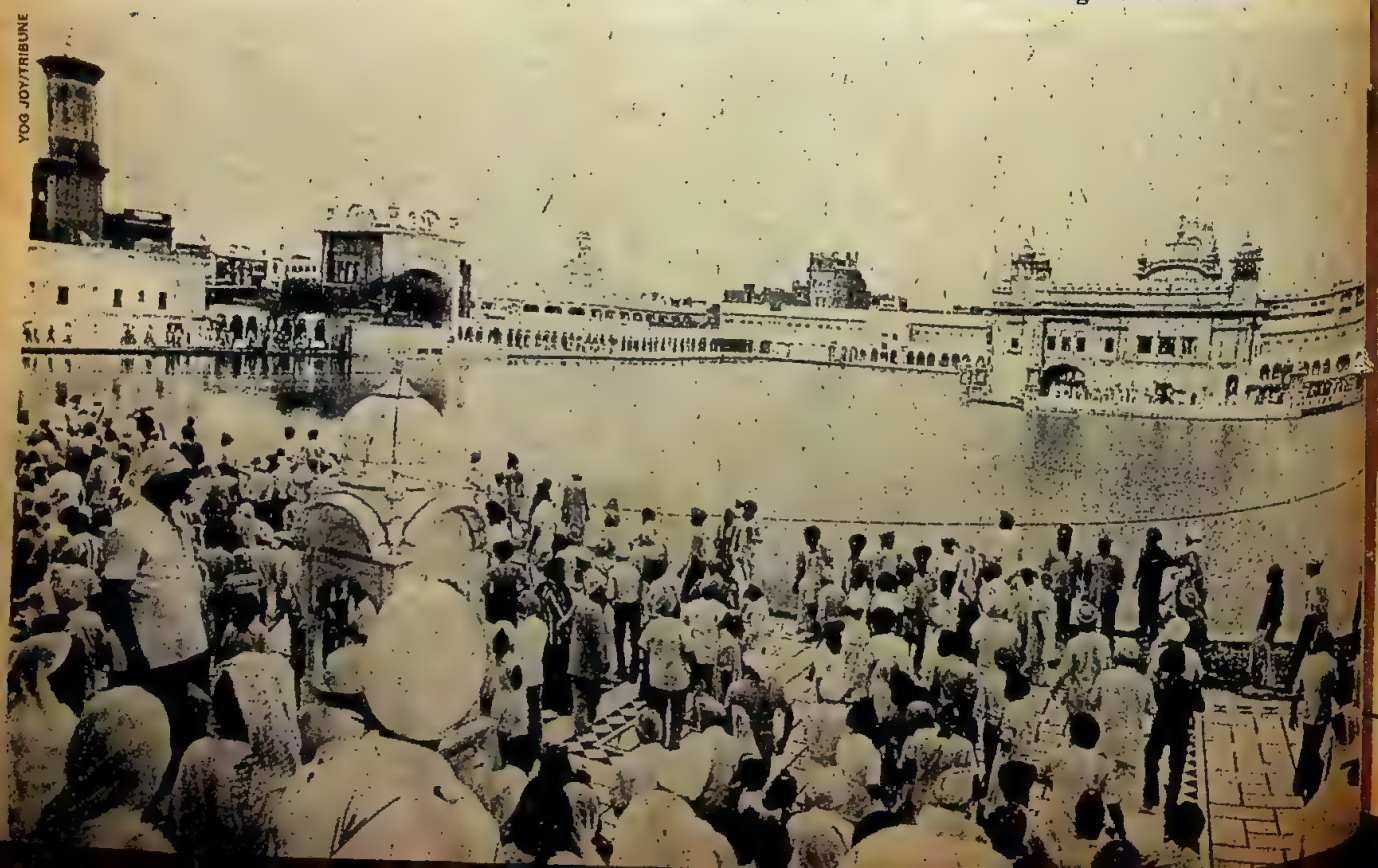
This problem must have weighed on Mrs Gandhi as she visited the temple last fortnight. But desperately as she is trying to break through the Sikh emotional resistance, she has no one left to talk to—with the Akali leaders in jail and discredited, and the saints and men of religion too angry and sensitive to indulge in political give and take. While destroying the extremists' backbone, the army operation has also willy-nilly destroyed all shades of Sikh leadership, a prospect the Government could not have welcomed.

Nor is it a welcome prospect for the Sikhs who suddenly find themselves an angry, bewildered community without a leadership. Said Sant Nihal Singh Harianwelanwale, a well-known Sikh saint shortly before he was arrested: "It will be stupid now to go looking for any other leaders when you have the five *Singh Sahiban* (the head priests)." But while the priests are respected by the entire community, they can hardly be ex-



Hordes of pilgrims crowd the Golden Temple premises (below) and a view of the damaged Akal Takht

YOG JOY/TRIBUNE



pected to fill the political void.

On another plane, the surviving remnants of the Akali leadership were going through desperate contortions to find an answer to the same question. In the first flush of excitement after the army operation, Ujaggar Singh Sekhwan, a senior vice-president took over as the working president of the party and immediately drew protests from the middle-level party functionaries. As he himself modestly confessed, "I may have been the senior vice-president of the party but I am basically a humble, ordinary worker. I can say nothing on the party yet." But even if he wanted to say something he was not given much time as the police arrested him two days before the scheduled meeting of the Akali Dal and SGPC functionaries.

Also arrested was the SGPC working president and former development minister Atma Singh. The arrests, in fact, came after senior intelligence officers had failed to persuade the makeshift leadership to refrain from making angry statements or giving fresh morcha calls. In fact a senior intelligence officer was sitting with Sekhwan when the INDIA TODAY correspondent visited the temporary Akali Dal headquarters in Guru Ram Dass hospital. The remaining leaders matter even less now particularly as Balwant Singh, former finance minister and the only prominent leader still out of jail has more or less kept out of politics in recent weeks.

IN SOME circles, however, the search for a new leader has begun. Some Akalis frequently mention Amarinder Singh, former Congress-(I) MP who resigned from the party and Parliament in protest against the army action and is at present riding a wave of popular support. The lobby working for him within the Akali Dal often talks of his strong ties with the leadership of the faith as a scion of the ruling family of Patiala whose ancestors were patronised by the Gurus.

But his engineering a coup in the Akali Dal from outside is still a distant possibility and, until a brand-new leadership emerges, the Akalis are likely to go strictly by the diktat of the five head priests who have already given a call to all Sikhs to observe July 15 as martyrdom day. Akali functionaries, however, point out in hushed tones that the head priests are simple, unsuspecting men of religion and can at times find it difficult to deal with political intrigue.

Nothing emphasises this better than the reports that, shortly before the army acted, rival groups within the temple complex were wooing the priests to sigh

PARAMILITARY

New force

BHINDRANWALE or no Bhindranwale, terrorism in India has come to stay. Or so at least the Government believes. In a quiet office in a large building in New Delhi's R.K. Puram locality, finishing touches were being given last fortnight to the blueprint for raising a brand-new paramilitary force, the National Guards. This will consist of men specially trained in the use of sophisticated weapons, unarmed combat and anti-terrorist warfare. According to authoritative sources in South Block, the new force could ultimately become 40-battalion strong which will make it half the size of the BSF or the CRPF. In fact it could very well turn out to be the largest specialised anti-terrorist force raised anywhere in the world.

R.T. Nagrani, an IPS officer of the 1951 vintage and currently an additional director with the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), has been assigned to raise the force. Nagrani, who has been designated director-general of National Guards, will do the job in addition to his regular assignment with RAW which includes the running of the hush-hush Special Frontier Force (SFF), based at Chakrata near Mussoorie in what is popularly known as the RAW's Establishment-22. He will be assisted by K. Dadabhoy who was till recently the inspector-general (operations) with the CRPF. Shortly, the Government is also likely to depute a senior army officer to join the team. Search for middle-level officers has also begun and a few are likely to be hand-picked from the existing paramilitary forces and the army to form the core of the new force.

While the idea, patronised by Ram Nath Kao, the former RAW chief and now the prime minister's security advisor, has been in the air for quite some time it has found acceptance only now, in the wake of the Punjab crisis when the state police and paramilitary forces BSF and (CRPF) failed to counter the terrorist threat. Presuming that terrorism is going to be a major problem in times to come, the Centre has thus okayed a scheme that could cost over Rs 100 crore in the next five years. While Nagrani and his aides work out the detailed plans, search has already begun abroad for suitable equipment. In all likelihood, the force will be equipped with the ultra-modern and deadly Armalite 5.56 mm automatic rifles, the standard NATO issue. The same rifle is also used by the army's paracommando units and also the commandos of the SFF. The force may also be sanctioned a small number of Carl Gustav guns — which the army used so effectively in the action on the Golden Temple complex — and other light automatic weapons with telescopic sights. The whole plan is being kept secret and officials are reluctant to admit that it exists.

But there are others who point the inherent contradictions in the plan. Commandos, senior officers say, are a special breed of men and thus it is impossible to raise a large body of anti-terrorist troops. Said an officer: "The Israelis have only a few hundred such troops. The British have barely 2,000. Even the Indian Army has just three battalions of paracommandos. It is obviously because only one person out of thousands is found physically and psychologically fit for commando warfare. But if you raise 40 battalions you will end up creating yet another BSF or CRPF though perhaps with smarter uniforms and better weapons." Critics of the scheme think that rather than raise yet another force, spending a whole lot of money on a new establishment the Government could have asked the existing paramilitary forces to raise a few anti-terrorist battalions.

Sources, in fact, point out that the BSF had, some time back, submitted a proposal to the Government for enhancing steeply the strength of its commando force which now numbers just about 150. The detailed proposal asked for Armalite rifles, good quality bullet-proof jackets and other specialised equipment. But it was turned down. Similarly the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which maintains a force of 170 commandos known to be some of the best in the country in unarmed combat, has not been allowed to add to the force.

But obviously the powers-that-be do not agree. A strong factor behind the decision seems to be the role the new force is expected to play in VVIP security and, South Block sources say, the Government is now totally enamoured of the plan. And thus, whether terrorism continues or goes, there will be no stopping the Nagrani brigade.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

Hukumnamas (edicts)—the extremists had a draft ordering Giani Zail Singh to resign and join the Akali morcha at the Golden Temple and the moderates had one asking people to eschew violence and communal killings.

If the Akalis have their problems, so does the Congress-(I). The party has no leader of stature who can be counted upon to apply the healing touch. Sharply divided between the Darbara Singh and Zail Singh groups, the party has still not been able to work out a strategy to counter the alienation of the Sikhs from both the party and the Central Government.

Said a Congress-(I) legislator bitterly: "The reality dawned on us when we tried to go out to the villages for the mass contact programme. The people despised us so much they wouldn't even give us water to drink. And even now, no party leader has as much as offered to resume some kind of contact with the people while half-a-dozen people have been making the rounds of Delhi angling for chief ministership."

IN THE rural areas, the Sikhs obviously identify the Congress-(I) with the Centre. And it is the latter, and the Hindus, that they blame for the army action. Most Congress-(I) leaders are being boycotted in their own villages. Torn between pressure from the community, friends and even families on the one hand and loyalty to the party on the other, they are caught in a vicious dilemma.

This is typified by former Congress minister Umrao Singh, whose family was the only one not to be invited to the *akhand path* in his village after the deaths in the Golden Temple. And yet his family insisted on having an *akhand path* in their own house too. Says a visibly disturbed Umrao Singh: "The Congressmen nee to reassure the Sikhs and the best way t do that is by leading the *kar sewa* themsel ves." He recalls how he was among th first batch led by Giani Zail Singh, the chief minister of Punjab, when the la *kar sewa* was held in 1975.

In any case, as President's Rule com pletes a year in three months from now Congress-(I) leaders look forward to th possibility of chief ministership. Amo the likely candidates are Gurudars Singh, backed by the Zail Singh group Santok Singh Randhawa, a protégé o Darbara Singh, and Gurcharan Singh Nihalsinghwala, who has the backing o Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar Congress-(I) circles also mention Bir Pal Singh of Ludhiana as a likely dark horse.

But while all the aspirants are former ministers, none has the popular backing and charisma required to even initiate th

STRATEGY

Army's Role

THREE weeks after Operation Bluestar in Amritsar, shock-waves continue to rock the beleaguered state of Punjab. Last fortnight, even as the army systematically melted away from the highways, thinning out in the countryside as well, and the official media intensified its publicity blitz claiming return to normalcy, terrorists had managed to strike again in a series of incidents that cut a wide arc across the state. A toll of over a dozen in a fortnight may look rather inconsequential compared to the steeply rising death-graph in the pre-Bluestar period. But it was ample indication of the fact that even if the fire had gone out of the terrorist movement, embers still burnt dangerously.

While sporadic incidents were reported from all over the state, the security agencies had their sensors glued particularly to the Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts, constituting the Majha region of Punjab that has always been more militant than the other two—Doaba and Malwa. New units of the army were being rapidly inducted in the border district of Gurdaspur where gangs of terrorists, including some that managed to escape from the Golden Temple, were known to be stalking the countryside. Said a senior army officer: "What happened in the Golden Temple was a straightforward frontal assault. The real counter-insurgency operation begins now and it is going to be trickier."

He was hardly exaggerating, for, as the Government agencies are realising increasingly now, the cordon-and-search operations in the villages are invariably fraught with the possibility of completely alienating an already sullen and irritable population.

The army top brass was, thus, busy drawing up plans to do so with minimum emotional damage by December, within the time-frame provided to them.

As part of this long-term planning the army is also helping reorganise the state's errant police force and streamline the administration. But obviously the exertions have not exactly been welcomed by the police and civil officials who consider the army's presence an irritant they have not been used to. Bureaucrats in Chandigarh point out that for the first time in the country's history the army has been given a direct role in running civil administration in a state with the appointment of Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dayal as the home advisor to the governor. He now looks after a lot more than the routine army operations and his job gives him the number two status in the Government after the governor, a fact most bureaucrats resent. "Have you seen the sixth floor?" is the question most of them ask a visitor, referring to the fact that the offices on the floor have been taken over by Lt-General Dayal and his aides.

While demands have been made for the withdrawal of the army, the role given to it in running the Home Department is indication enough that the Government does not intend to begin trusting the civil officials with the administration of the state in a hurry. Sources in Delhi say the army will continue to occupy the sixth floor offices till normalcy is restored in the state, and the police is reorganised and purged of doubtful characters. The process of screening the police force has already begun, and the Union Home Ministry has been dropping enough hints of changes at the higher levels also, typified by last week's removal of the IGP, P.S. Bhinder. There is nothing specifically against him, but the Centre perhaps feels that these changes are necessary to convince people that it means business.

As for the army, the reorganisation of the police and the civil administration was not part of its initial assignment. Basically, the army had come in with the brief to execute three plans:

► Operation Bluestar: to finish terrorism in the state, beginning with clearing the Golden Temple complex, and following it up with mopping up operations in the countryside.

► Operation Metal: to capture Bhindranwale and his key aides.

► Operation Woodrose: to seal off and effectively guard the border with Pakistan to ensure that it is not able to use undue military advantage of the disturbed conditions in the state.

But beefing up of the civil administration, official sources in South Block explain, becomes more or less part of the basic anti-terrorist operation. "Our brief was not just to clear the temple," said an army officer, "the job was

long haul back to normalcy. It is obvious that such hopeless lack of political talent will make things difficult for Mrs Gandhi who is reported to have already begun thinking in terms of extreme constitutional measures, such as an amendment to extend President's Rule beyond one year or declare partial emergency in the state.

But officials in South Block point out that none of these will be an easy alternative. A constitutional amendment will mean loss of face since the Government had forced elections on Assam in February 1983, firmly putting down the demand to amend the Constitution. Again, imposition of emergency will be an extremely embarrassing expedient at a time when the Government would much rather claim that the state is returning to normalcy. Political pundits, however, feel that the best course would still be to try out a chief minister because, while officials can be counted upon to carry out tough, unpopular tasks that politicians will avoid, they are not the best people to apply the healing touch.

BY EXTENSION of the same logic, it is argued that if the Centre allows the political vacuum to continue for too long, its direct consequence will be the devolution of unchallenged authority among the Sikh masses to the new, extremely fundamentalist leadership that will inevitably emerge in the wake of the recent developments.

Political observers are keenly waiting to see who takes over the mantle of Bhindranwale as the chief of the Damdami Taksal, one of the most important Sikh seminaries. But irrespective of whether the new leadership comes from the Damdami Taksal or not, it will have to talk in terms of the extreme fundamentalism with which Bhindranwale had fired the popular imagination.

That is all the more reason for Delhi to take solid political initiative now. It is tempting to misread overt calm in Punjab as abject capitulation or acceptance of the army action. But that will be a grave error for, as the Akali Dal Working President, Ujaggar Singh Sekhwan, says: "It is very difficult to read the feeling of our people. When someone gets married, we sing verses and distribute *kada-prasad*. When someone dies, we do the same. Don't think we have accepted everything."

The need of the hour, thus will be to entrust Punjab to a leadership that understands this sentiment. It will be unrealistic to expect the army or the bureaucrats to do that for the aftermath of Operation Bluestar is a complex mix of religious and political issues that only pragmatic politics can tackle.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA



Jawans repairing damaged portions of the temple complex

bring about lasting peace to Punjab. And since the army does not want to get bogged down here like in the North-east, the best way is to help organise the police and civil administration so that they are able to get the measure of the extremists by themselves."

Yet, the army itself could not fancy lingering on for too long as that process would only be governed by the law of diminishing returns. As such, widespread allegations have been made of excesses in the rural areas during combing operations. And even if most of these are false, they are likely to be believed at least among the Sikh population in an atmosphere full of distrust in the Government.

Similarly, the army's continued presence in a dominating role causes frictions at other levels also. Inter-service rivalry is an old phenomenon and in situation like the one in Punjab, obviously, the various forces try to find scapegoats and blame each other for what has really been the government agencies' collective failure. The BSF, for example, feels sore because it believes it is being singled out for blame by the Government and the army propaganda for smuggling of arms and narcotics. In a tell-tale gesture last fortnight, a BSF spokesman in Delhi had firmly denied the story released by the Press Trust of India (PTI) 10 days ago, quoting army sources as saying that a large amount of heroin and other narcotics were found from inside the Golden Temple. Later, embarrassed army and Goverment spokesmen also repeated the denial and even forced the PTI to do so.

At the same time, detailed inspection of captured weapons has also proved that a majority of these are of Indian origin. Basically, the seized weapons include 10 Sten guns, 49 Light machine guns, 17 carbines, 52 Chinese-made AK-47 sub-machine-guns, 82 self-loading rifles mainly of Indian origin, 420 rifles of .303 calibre, two Chinese-made 40 mm rocket-propelled grenade launchers, 56 pistols and 46 revolvers of assorted makes. While a large number of these weapons are of Indian make, the heavier ones have certainly come from across the border.

Though the BSF does taken a certain element of the blame for unfettered smuggling, to hold them entirely responsible would be unrealistic. Smuggling along the Indo-Pak border has got institutionalised in the hands of organised mafias. This realisation dawned on the security forces last month when, over a fortnight after the troops moved over to the border, 15 kg of heroin, valued at more than Rs 1 crore was seized near Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district.

But control cannot be achieved without more vigilant surveillance and also much better coordination among the various armed forces and intelligence agencies. Government spokesmen in Delhi say it is basically to achieve this end that the army being "the seniormost" among all services has been given the leadership of the law and order machinery.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

BHAKRA

Serious Blow

ON THE night of June 5-6 when the army was entering the Golden Temple in its bid to flush out terrorists, about a dozen men were stealthily making their way to the right bank of the Bhakra main line (BML) canal with sinister purpose. Their plan was to breach the brick-lined lifeline of this predominatly agricultural region. Between the bridge connecting Chandigarh with Ropar and the Budki rivulet syphon they managed to cut a small 3 ft by 5 ft embankment with spades.

The sabotage was frighteningly successful. Within a short while the pressure of water from this 12,000 cusec capacity canal which that midnight was carrying over 11,000 cusecs to irrigate arid stretches of land in Haryana and Rajasthan, had widened the gap to 1,600 ft. The water pressure soon breached the left bank of the canal.

Fortunately, the saboteurs had not thought fit to breach the canal a few metres downstream of Budki. If that had been the case the whole syphon would have been washed away, jeopardising at least three successive crops in over three lakh hectares of Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab, besides cutting off drinking water to several thousand villages. Thankful for small favours, S.S. Gill, chief engineer of the crack task force repairing the canal, says: "A cut downstream could have taken at least a year and a half to repair."

For troubled Punjab, which had been going through near-total curfew and had most communication lines cut, the canal breach came as a severe blow. Repair work that should have got into swing immediately began with agonising slowness. For the first three days no one, not even Governor B.D. Pande could devise a clear-cut strategy. The military would not allow any movement and even a team of engineers escorted by the Punjab Police was turned back.

It was only when Haryana, a state which was painfully dependent on the canal for drinking water and irrigation, began making strident complaints that Pande called in senior engineers from the Sutlej-Yamuna link (SYL) canal, state power board and hydel projects to devise a strategy. Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and Irrigation Minister S.S. Surjewala were still not satisfied, and refused to visit the site with Pande. "What use are these ceremonies when Punjab is moving at a snail's pace to repair our lifeline?" questioned an angry Surjewala.

As a consequence the repair work picked up speed. It is a massive operation requiring a horde of machines and men which is busy day and night settling clay, spreading fresh dry earth and raising banks and concretising them. Twenty-five excavators, 72 dumpers, 25 bulldozers and two dozen cement mixers run on both power and diesel. "We are sparing no effort. Breakfast and lunch are served right over the workplace; no one leaves the machines even for a minute," says Gill.

But the target date for completion of the work still seems hard to attain. It has already been advanced by a week; the work is now expected to be completed by July 7. But the impending rains could further delay it. Working at a feverish pace, Gill and his men and machines moved 45 lakh cubic feet of earth in just four days. Now, ironically, they pray that it does not rain, while farmers pray that it does.

Meanwhile, Haryana is passing through some of its worst times since the advent of the Green Revolution over two decades ago. The state's farmers have not been able to sow cotton in one lakh of the targeted 4.20 lakh hectares. Farm experts estimate the loss at Rs 40 crore for cotton alone. "I have only sown three of my nine hectares," says Sahib Ram, 55, of Sirsa. He plans to sow bajra and jowar on the remainder of his land. In areas acutely hit by the water failure, the state is planning to ask the farmers to go in for dry land farming. In Hissar, Sirsa and Narwana subdivision of Jind, which together produce half the state's foodgrain, at least 50 per cent of the kharif crop is doomed.

Grimmer still is the drinking water supply situation in over 1,500 villages. Over 430 state-run tubewells are running constantly to supply drinking water in these villages. Rajasthan too is suffering. Though its share from the BML is only 1,500 cusecs, that is an important share which quenches the thirst of large areas in Ganganagar and Bikaner districts of the state. But Haryana is feeling the worst pinch—its share of the BML's 12,000 cusecs is 9,500 cusecs. By begging and borrowing from various sources, it may yet be able to do some sowing. But, says Surjewala: "We have no exact estimate of the loss, but it could cross the Rs 100 crore mark." Haryana has requested the Centre to meet a part of the loss at least.

In the bid to find the culprits responsible for the breach, the police have concentrated their efforts on the village of Dulchi Majri, 5 km from the breach site. A dozen of its young men have been arrested for the breach, and the police claim that the case has almost been solved. But others claim that the young men have only admitted that they felled trees to block the roads. The police claim that an Akali activist had convinced village sarpanch Gurcharan Singh that they ought to cut the canal as part of the non-cooperation movement.

Regrettably, the police action has only annoyed more of the local people and thereby made the canal more vulnerable. District Magistrate M.S. Kailey who first threatened to impose a fine of Rs 1 crore (the cost of the repairs) on 100 adjoining villages, discovered in time that such a step was both illegal and counter-productive. The Drainage Act of 1878 did not make provisions for any such fines and estranged farmers, he explained later, could be a serious threat to the runnjng of the canal. He is now addressing village leaders to win their support and help avoid any further sabotage to what is the jugular of Punjab. —GOBIND THUKRAL

The breached Bhakra canal under repair: heavy loss



WEST BENGAL

The Governing Issue



AS WEST Bengal's ruling Left Front completed its sixth year in power last fortnight, it found itself faced with just the kind of confrontation with the Centre it had been fearing since the day of its inception. Symbolising the Centre in the fracas was state Governor Ananta Prasad Sharma who first withheld assent to the Calcutta University (Amendment) Bill, 1984, and sent it to the President and then delivered the coup de grace by ignoring the state Government's choice, Prasad Ghosh, and instead appointing Shankar Prasad Banerjee as the vice-chancellor of Burdwan University. In retaliation the Left Front angrily issued orders to all ministers to "boycott" the governor, instructed Education Secretary Penn Anthony not to function any longer as the ex-officio secretary to the governor in his capacity as the chancellor of various universities, and finally dispatched a lengthy note to the prime minister demanding Sharma's recall.

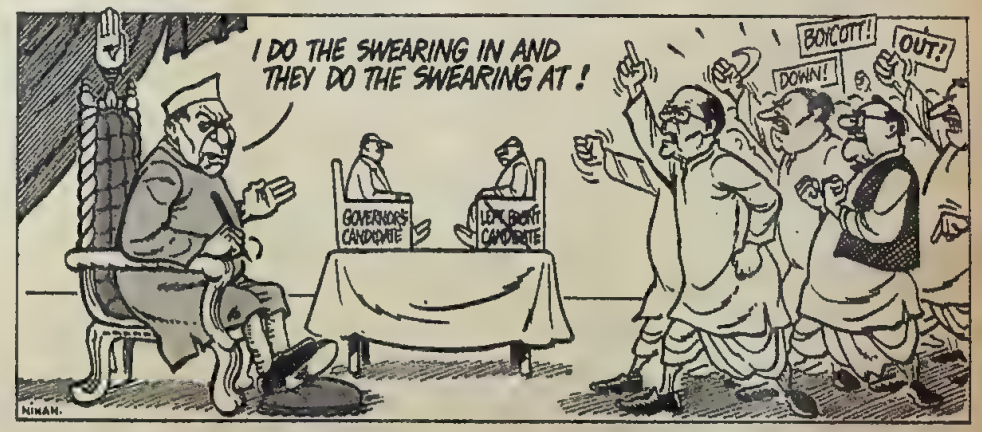
Sharma's reaction was to play down the controversy. "These measures are entirely uncalled for as in all my actions I have strictly followed the law," he declared. And even his detractors have to admit the truth of that. Acknowledged CPI(M) state committee member Anil Biswas: "We are not denying that while making the Burdwan University appointment, the governor was following the law. But in the process he made mincemeat of norms and conventions which are more important."

According to the law, the court of Burdwan University presents to the governor, who is also the chancellor of the institution, a panel of three names from which he is supposed to select one, "in consultation with the education minister", for appointment to the office of the vice-chancellor. The governor maintains legally that "consultation" does not mean that "I will have to concur with the education minister", justifying his decision to ignore Education Minister Sambhu Ghosh's recommendation of the name of Prasad Ghosh and instead opt for Shankar Prasad Banerjee.

However, by his action, the governor did create the impression that he was deliberately out to antagonise the Left Front. Earlier, he had done just that when he had rejected its recommendation to reappoint Ramen Poddar as the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University and instead chose Santosh Bhattacharya on the ground that the latter had got more of the preferential votes from the senate members. Although legally in the right, he had nonetheless violated a convention, as there are precedents in the state of earlier governors ignoring the voting figures and agreeing with the ministry's recommendation while appointing vice-chancellors. And in the case of Burdwan University where the panel of names was selected and not elected by the court, the governor did seem to be going out of his way by not accepting the ministry's recommendation. His argument was: "Nobody can say that the man I chose did not possess a brilliant academic record or that he did not have administrative experience. So why could the ministry not agree with my choice, instead of insisting on a person who perhaps is politically close to them?"

Immediately after its set-back at Calcutta University, the Left Front had got down to business and passed an amending bill in the Assembly which sought to drastically reduce the chancellor's role in the matter of appointment of vice-chancellor. It clearly said that the "vice-chancellor shall be appointed by the chancellor on the recommendation of the senate" and stipulated that the senate shall elect only one person, instead of the present system of three, and recommend his name to the chancellor who will then have no option but to accept it. The argument of Education Minister Ghosh was that this would place the ultimate authority in the hands of an elected body like the senate and would be "entirely in keeping with democratic norms". The governor, however, had other views and, according to the grape-vine, egged on by prominent Congress(I) leaders like Pranab Mukherjee, sent the bill to the President.

The reaction of Santosh Bhattacharya, Calcutta University vice-chancellor and Sharma's nominee, was similar to that of the governor. "The university is run by public funds and there must be some accountability. Vesting elected bodies like the senate and syndicate with more powers may sound all right but in which way will they be accountable to the people?" he asked. Bhattacharya had good reason to be irked by the amending bill, as it also sought to reduce the vice-chancellor's powers by ensuring that he could make appointments to the post of pro-vice-chancellor only on the recommendation of the senate. It also stipulates that if any dispute arises regarding any action of the vice-chancellor, the decision of the senate or the syndicate would be final. West Bengal's ruling Marxists dominate both these bodies and they clearly are trying to ensure that in future their plans are not foiled by a politically antagonistic chancellor or vice-chancellor. Governor Sharma, however, is tending to take a more long-term view and has been telling people: "Today the Left Front may enjoy a majority in these bodies but what is the guarantee that they will continue to have this in the future?"



In his anxiety to be absolutely legalistic, Sharma currently is also questioning the Left Front's contention that he is not cooperating with the Government. His argument is: "I may not agree with the education minister but that does not mean that I am in disagreement with the entire Government. Is he the whole Government and will the Government fall if he resigns?" he asks. The sharp rebuke from the Left Front was: "Who is he trying to deceive? Doesn't he know

that when the education minister made his recommendations he was voicing the recommendation of the entire Cabinet?"

Sharma, who began his political career in West Bengal as a railway employee in Howrah station and a trade unionist, has made it clear that he will not cave in to Left Front pressure. "I may go, but how will it help the Left Front? Individuals are not important, it is the system that is, and that system will continue to remain even when I am gone," he declared. The implication clearly was that in the existing situation, the Centre could always needle a non-Congress(I) ministry through the occupant of Raj Bhavan and that anybody who succeeded him could also be made to do the same. And on the Left Front's contention (as contained in the memorandum to the prime minister) that both his successors, the late T.N. Singh and B.D. Pande, were more cooperative with the ministry than him, Sharma casually points out that he is merely expected "to act according to the law and not follow the ways of his predecessors". On the boycott issue, he points out that he can also create a constitutional impasse by refusing to swear in a minister who may be inducted in the Cabinet.

Meanwhile, according to informed sources, Sharma has been regularly meeting groups of Congress(I) workers. To his confidants who visit him at Raj Bhavan, he fumes that "all this attack against me is actually aimed at diverting people's attention from the fact that the ministry has failed to solve any of their problems. Some of the complaints I receive against the Government are really shocking."

However, last fortnight, the ruling Marxists were confident that Sharma would lose out in the race as "with Punjab in her hands, Indira Gandhi will not dare antagonise us by rejecting our demand for his recall". On top of this came the announcement that Sharma was being given the additional charge of looking after the Union territory of Andaman and Nicobar for a month while the Lt-Governor was on leave. This was interpreted to mean that the Centre wanted him out of the scene until the heat subsided. In the meantime, the Left Front has kept the campaign going. It is planning to bring out a booklet on Sharma's "misdeeds". Various meetings to "mobilise public opinion against A.P. Sharma" have also been held and several more are in the pipeline. This clearly reveals the Left Front's intention to carry the fight between a state government and its constitutional head to the bitter end.

—SUMANTA SEN

CALCUTTA

Metro Mess

THE UNEXPECTED deluge that flooded Calcutta last month has washed out the Metro Railway authorities' plans to commence services on a limited stretch from the beginning of July. Metro engineers venturing down the subways to the underground stations on June 6 were horrified to find themselves stepping down into an underground reservoir of sorts. The water was immediately pumped out, but the damage was done. The flooding had set back once again Calcutta's solution to its nightmarish transport problem.



BIKAS DAS

Draining Metro flood water

Attempting to save themselves from the blast of criticism that followed, Metro authorities declared that the city's drainage system was responsible for the flooding. They said a sewer at the southern end of the 4-km stretch (at the Elgin Road-Chowringhee crossing) that was to be opened for services cracked and flooded a long stretch of road. Irate residents attempting to drain away the water unwittingly destroyed an earthen embankment put up to prevent seepage of water into the open end of the tunnel. According to K.N. Dasgupta, general manager of the Metro Railway, the seepage of water into the other eight surface openings was negligible compared to the estimated 50 gallons of water that cascaded into the tunnel from the Bhowanipur end.

Hoping to outwit the monsoons, the surface kept open at places to allow coaches and other equipment to be lowered, was scheduled to be closed only by June 10. A senior Metro engineer admitted ruefully: "The unprecedented pre-monsoon showers of June 5 caught us unprepared." Moreover, since only a limited portion of the 17-km tunnel was being put to service, the internal drainage system too, was far from completed.

Unlike the press and public, the state Government's reaction has been less strident—probably because the city's inadequate drainage system was at the root of the disaster. A team of railway experts sent by the Railway Board to draw up a plan to prevent waterlogging along the Metro route was welcomed with open arms. The three-member team has suggested that the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority lay large diametre sewers along the length of the tunnel, with openings into channels leading to the river Hooghly and other canals in the city. The project cost will be borne by the railways.

Apart from the traction equipment, 16 coaches with two motors inside each, were found totally submerged. As the water line slowly descended, engineers opened up equipment to check the damage. According to one such Metro official: "It will take a few weeks just to estimate the extent of damage." In order to hasten normalisation, Metro authorities plan to fit motors from four new coaches ready for delivery at Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) into the coaches already inside the tunnel.

Meanwhile, the giant sewer is once again a Metro tunnel and cleaning operations have started in dry parts. Surface openings have been sealed and embankments at the open ends strengthened. "There will be no repetition of such a calamity," assured Dasgupta, adding, "there is no reason to believe there is any hazard in starting commercial services in the middle section." The first week of October has been targeted for the opening of partial commercial services.

But even if the deadline is met, the flooding will go down in as yet another major planning disaster perpetuated by the same kind of myopic thinking that has allowed the city to turn into an urban nightmare.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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BOMBAY

An Accommodating Act

GIVEN a choice, few landlords would care to have politicians as their tenants. But then, sometimes they have no choice at all. Sitabai Gupta, who with her late husband Kundanlal, owned the Oceana Building on Bombay's Marine Drive certainly didn't, and for 18 futile years, she has been trying to get her VIP tenant evicted from one of the apartments. Finally, last fortnight, the appellate bench of the sessions court ordered her tenant Kanti Desai, whose father Morarji Desai lives with him, to vacate the apartment within three months. But Gupta has no reason to be smug: Kanti Desai's secretary says they will appeal the judgement in the high court.

Gupta's troubles began in 1956, when her tenant Varadachari, the income tax commissioner, said he wanted to leave as he wanted a smaller place after his retirement which was due soon. The Guptas had until then been staying in a rented apartment in Gamdevi, and this, they thought, would give them the chance to return to their own apartment.

They were wrong. Under the rules of the Requisition Act, they had to notify the Government about the vacancy. And unfortunately for them, the controller of accommodation had agreed to an exchange of allotment with Kanti Desai, who was then living in a flat on Queen's Road. The application had been cleared in one day flat. Kanti's father was then chief minister, and was leaving office three days later to take over as Union finance minister. Twenty-eight years later, last fortnight, the appellate bench said Kanti Desai had exploited his father's position in securing "this extraordinary efficiency from the controller."

In 1966, Sitabai moved the small causes court for Desai's eviction on four counts, and actually won the case in 1975. A bailiff had even come to evict Desai. Strangely, however, the appellate court accepted an appeal by Kanti Desai even though it was time-barred, and Sitabai consequently was back to square one.

But this time, the appellate bench ruled against the former prime minister's son. Judges S.N. Gatna and M.V. Pandit upheld all four contentions of the landlady. Some highlights of the judgement:

► The court agreed with Gupta that she had accepted Kanti Desai as her tenant, and not the Bombay General Trading Co Pvt Ltd of which he is the managing director. It said he had illegally used a residential premises for business.

► From the start, Desai had sat on the stamped copy of the tenancy agreement which he ought to have signed and returned to Gupta. It appeared the landlady had refused to make the tenancy in the name of the company, which is why Desai refused to return it. The court accepted Gupta's contention that the tenant had delayed returning the agreement because of the high influence of his father.

► Desai had settled his rent from November 1956 to September 1960—a period of three years and 10 months—with a cheque of Rs 26,504.49, after refusing to pay earlier except through his firm, which was not acceptable to the landlady. Again, he neglected to pay rent between October 1964 and March 1966, and was also in arrears about the water tax payment.

► During the period that Gupta filed a recovery suit, her tenant had two apartments at Chitrakut on Altamount Road, which he had bought in the names of his wife and minor sons. He had bought them for Rs 1.15 lakh each. and was getting an estimated Rs 2,250 a month in rent. He later sold them for Rs 2 lakh each. The judges had this to say: "The Bombay Rent Control Act was never meant for the protection of a tenant like the defendant, especially when vacant possession of the Chitrakut Flat No. 81 was obtained by him while disposing it to a third party for great profit." The court did not agree with Desai's contention that the rent of Rs 513.35 was excessive for a flat that measured 3,500 sq ft.

Morarji Desai had set the trend for his successors. Nearly every chief minister that followed has obtained a coveted permanent tenancy in Bombay under the Requisition Act. These tenancies obtained through government influence are mostly in the heart of exclusive old south Bombay, where thanks to the outdated Rent Act, the rents are a small percentage of the apartment's current rental value. Usually when such flats fall vacant, black money or "pugree" up to anything between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 30 lakh is demanded by the landlord from the tenant before he can move in.

The Requisition Act of 1948 was introduced originally as a temporary measure, basically to provide accommodation for army troops and for evacuees during the

Morarji with Kanti Desai; and (below) their apartment in Oceana

MUKUL ROY





Partition. Later, the Act was used mainly for the Government to secure accommodation for its officers. But many VIPs misused the provision to requisition houses and then derequisition them so that they could stay on in their private capacity.

So high-handed was the requisitioning by the Government that some 30 years ago, the entire Majestic Hotel, Colaba, was requisitioned because someone in power was ill-disposed towards the landlord. The once-exclusive hotel is now a shabby MLA's quarters. And in the early '60s, a whole floor of a building near Regal, Colaba, was requisitioned and then derequisitioned so that the chief minister's doctor could move in and also set up a clinic there.

The list of chief ministers who have benefited is pretty long, too. Even before Y.B. Chavan became chief minister, he was allotted an apartment in Riveira Building on Marine Drive. S.B. Chavan, now Union planning minister has a derequisitioned apartment on Babulnath Road near Chowpatty. Sharad Pawar, leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, has an apartment in Maheshwari Mansions, Napean Sea Road, which was originally evacuee property.

The controversial ex-chief minister A.R. Antulay obtained a one-time government apartment at Heliopolis, Colaba, which he later bought over as a member of the cooperative and then rented out to a bank. By the standards of his predecessors, Babasaheb Bhosale was given a raw deal, as his derequisitioned apartment in Gulistan, Napean Sea Road, is a little dilapidated. The present Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil had a derequisitioned apartment on Gunbow Street in the 1960s when he was president of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee. During an earlier tenure as irrigation minister, Jyoti Sadan Building in Mahim which had been requisitioned for the accommodation of police officers was slowly derequisitioned and Patil's family and his in-laws, the Phalkes, moved into the five apartments.

A list of those whom the Requisition Act has helped reads like a Maharashtra political who's who. And practically all of them have been accommodated in choice localities like Churchgate Reclamation, Oval, Malabar Hill. The distinguished list includes: former deputy leader of the Congress(I) in Rajya Sabha, Rafiq Zakaria, who has an apartment at Sea Land, Cuffe Parade; former deputy chief minister N.K. Tirpude, Muskti Court, Oval; and son-in-law of Ramrao Adik, Jambuwantrao Dhote, MP, Ram Mansions, Napean Sea Road; former law minister Hussain Dalwai, MP, Express, Oval Court; former minister, the late A. Parwekar Deshmukh, Baug-e-Sara, Napean Sea Road; former MLC Qamar Ahmed, Rehmat Manzil, Churchgate Reclamation; former minister M.G. Mane, Parsi Colony, Dadar; former state Janata Party president the late Rajaramabapu Patil, Hill Site Bungalow, Napean Sea Road.

However, politicians are not the only ones who have gained. Bureaucrats, say politicians, are much bigger beneficiaries. Said a former minister: "Officers are in a much better position to get the best accommodation, as they have all the files and know exactly which flats are vacant." Most retired chief secretaries and deputy secretaries have derequisitioned apartments. Former governor O.P. Mehra got a requisitioned apartment on Carmichael Road when he was quitting the state on the ground that his son had to complete his education. But long after he had moved to Rajasthan as governor, his family continued to use the apartment. Former Sikkim governor Homi Taleyarkhan was allotted evacuee property in Currimbhoy Mansion, Warden Road, years ago.

But bureaucrats charge the politicians with usurping bungalows and apartments originally meant for them. Today even senior officers posted at Bombay have a hard time getting accommodation. Due to mounting criticism of the indiscriminate use of the Requisition Act which had been introduced nearly 36 years ago as just a "temporary measure", the Government has of late been very sparing in using Bhosale's apartment which was requisitioned last year is reportedly the last.

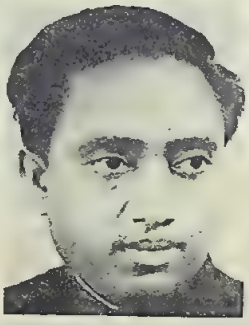
Instead, there is a new scheme, the chief minister's discretionary housing quota, which fills the gap. Flats handed over by builders to the Government are sold to "needy persons" under certain provisions of the Urban Land Ceiling Act at prices one-tenth the prevailing rate. But this could be just the same thing in a new disguise—some of the needy persons chosen for the Government's beneficence are Pratibha Patil, minister for civil supplies, Nanbhoi Embadwar, minister for agriculture, and Uttamrao Patil, president of the state BJP.

—COOMI KAPOOR

PRIVILEGED POLITICIANS



Vasantdada Patil



N.K. Tirpude



Y.B. Chavan



Sharad Pawar



Jambuwantrao Dhote



S.B. Chavan

A.R. ANTULAY

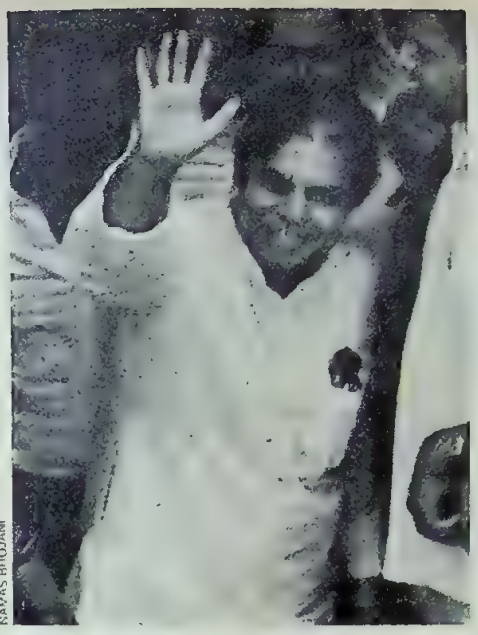
Timely Retreat

"I HAVE unburdened myself," remarked former chief minister A.R. Antulay. The diehard politician was not referring to any confessional. He had just stepped down last week as chairman and member of the Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishthan (IGPP), the Konkan Unnati Mitra Mandal and four other trusts all of which have gained notoriety by linkage with Antulay and the reported quid pro quo system of fund collection. Antulay's resignation is in response to what he termed was the Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil's "intriguing reluctance" to make the Government take over the Pratishthan. Despite repeated requests for such a bill, Patil, Antulay feels, is prevaricating by suggesting that he first hold a dialogue with the Opposition.

The Opposition, says Antulay, is only ready to criticise without coming up with any constructive suggestion. He wrote twice to opposition leaders asking for suggestions but received no response. The impasse over the trust continues following the freezing of the funds by the high court in 1982 so that not a single paisa can be utilised except for office maintenance. By now the Pratishthan has prepared 23 schemes for helping artistes in various ways and the original Rs 5 crore has burgeoned to Rs 6.5 crore with interest. But the money remains untouched in a bank.

Suspecting that he is the hurdle in unfreezing the trust funds, Antulay has nominated P.K. Sawant, a septuagenarian Congressman and former minister now in semi-retirement as his successor. But a new chairman "will hardly lessen the burden of Antulay's problems in court," feels Mahesh Jethmalani, one of the prosecuting counsel.

Last week, Antulay appointed two new members of the trust: Pramod Navalkar of the Shiv Sena and R.S. Gavai of the Republican Party of India (RPI). Most of the original trustees have long since resigned and there is speculation that as the trial proceeds there might be a fall-out among them over the share of guilt. This appears likely, since the prosecution may make former ministers Ramrao Adik and N.M. Tidke co-accused. If it can be established that Antulay tried to pass off his private trust as a government trust then Adik could also be held guilty. For, Adik and Tidke were both ministers in Antulay's cabinet and according to witness



NAVAS BHOJANI

Antulay: stepping down

Shalinitai Patil, on October 6, 1980 there was an announcement in the cabinet meeting that the Pratishthan was a government trust. Adik as finance minister not only called the trust a government one in his budget speech but sanctioned government funds.

One point that Antulay is bound to make in his defence is that the trust deed was drafted by co-trustees Rafiq Zakaria, former deputy leader of the Congress(I) in the Rajya Sabha and Adik, both lawyers. The minutes of the Pratishthan meetings which were finally filed in the court before the vacation show that Antulay repeated this point several times at trust meetings. At another meeting Antulay clarified that though he was entitled to nominate trustees to the board he had always acted in consultation with other members. Adik, on the other hand, it was later discovered, had cleared payments to the office staff without sanction from the board and what is more had not adhered to the "strict principles of economy".

Minutes of the trust's meetings do not make any mention of quid pro quo form of fund collection. In fact at the first two meetings the members discussed the possibilities of raising funds by involving the Jaycees, Lions and Rotarians in organising cricket matches, film star nites, and other such entertainment shows. The target was set at Rs 5 crore for the end of April 1981. But apparently such schemes did not yield dividends, as by June 1981 Zakaria, bemoaning the lack of funds, expressed apprehension that because of the paucity of funds the IGPP might end up as an object of ridicule. But Antulay expressed confidence that the target would be achieved shortly. At the next meeting in July 1981 he announced triumphantly that the sugar corporations would be donating Rs 4 crore and with a government contribution of Rs 2 crore this would come to Rs 6.5 crore. Shortly thereafter the sugar donations started flowing in.

The prosecution's strategy will be to suggest that the idea of quid pro quo as a fund raising method first originated in September 1980 when Antulay was dealing with the Maharashtra Wine Merchants Association and the Hotel and Restaurant Association (Western India). The wine merchants were upset about a proposed change in the city municipal laws which would have increased the mandatory distance between a liquor shop and places of worship and schools, creating difficulties for many shops. However, the matter was amicably resolved and the two associations announced straightaway that they would be contributing a purse of Rs 25 lakh to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Suspicion that there was more to this generosity than met the eye was strengthened by a circular issued in September 1980 asking members to contribute Rs 2,000 to Rs 5,000 for this purpose within a week. Ramdas Nayak of the BJP issued a statement alleging that the fund collection was "pure and simple blackmail".

The Hotel and Restaurant Association felt charitably inclined when there was a controversy about their licence renewals. The prosecution case will be that the sugar contributions to the IGP were on the same pattern as those of the wine merchants to the chief minister's fund.

Last fortnight there was a minor fracas in the courtroom when it was discovered that seven files of the IGPP were missing. Defence counsel Ramakant Ovalekar explained that this was because at one time the civil defence had evicted the Pratishthan from its office at Industrial Assurance Building, Churchgate, and had thrown all its possessions out. In the process some files got lost. The chief minister had subsequently apologised to the Pratishthan for the unceremonious removal and given the trust back its earlier government allotment.

The affairs of the Pratishthan will be taken up in detail once the evidence from the witnesses dealing with the contributions from sugar cooperatives is over. The prosecution is hopeful that there are still some juicy facts about the Pratishthan which will emerge when the various trustees are brought to the witness box.

— COOMI KAPOOR

MAHARASHTRA

Sugar Coating



A POLITICAL leader who claims to be of consequence in western Maharashtra and does not control a cooperative would be as incongruous as a man in a safari suit professing to be a Gandhian. For, in this prosperous sector of the state, politics and cooperatives—especially sugar cooperatives—go hand in hand. With political prestige as well as the many perks of office at stake, last month's elections to the state's sugar cooperatives generated as much excitement and hoopla as any general election. Candidates gave rousing speeches, splashy posters were everywhere and jeeps with blaring microphones did the rounds.

Some of the less savoury elements of politics were also apparent. Rumours abounded that the going rate for purchase of a member's vote was about Rs 500 in a sick cooperative factory and Rs 1,500 in an affluent sugar mill. In one particular cooperative candidates were actually offering motorcycles and gold chains for votes.

Over a third of the country's sugar is produced in Maharashtra, and western Maharashtra accounts for 60 of the state's 76 factories. Of these 90 per cent are in the cooperative sector. The turnover of the state's sugar factories was Rs 800 crore this year and the extent of the cooperatives' control of the industry can be gauged by the fact that they employ 60,000 workers annually and 2.5 lakh seasonally. About 3 lakh farmers sell cane, and about 2 lakh of them are members of cooperatives.

But since 1981-82, when it touched a peak and the turnover in the state was a record Rs 1,100 crore, the price of cane has been coming down. This has made the farmers angry, and that anger was apparent in the election results announced last fortnight. These produced quite a few upsets. In the poll held for 32 cooperatives, 10 setting boards—many of whose members had been well-entrenched for years—were thrown out. In all the contests the winning margins were greatly reduced and even Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil, considered the uncrowned king of the sugar lobby in India, managed to secure only 60 per cent of the votes in the election to the Shetkari Sakhar Karkhana (SSK) in Sangli against his rivals who were almost unknown.

The majority of the contestants in the poll were from the Congress(I), which has a strong base in the cooperative sector, but Janata, Congress(S) and Peasants and Workers Party men also contested. In most cooperatives there were two or even three contesting panels of Congressmen. Frequently one panel would link up with opposition groups against rivals from their own party.

A significant development this time



BHAWAN SINGH



Vasantdada (left) and the Sangli sugar factory: power base

was the contesting by militant farm leader Sharad Joshi's Shetkari Sangathan of elections to four cooperatives. The Shetkari Sangathan won control of the financially sound Yashwant SSK in Pune. Joshi's men unseated Manibhai Desai, the Magsaysay Award winner who had been in control of the Yashwant factory for a decade. Gloated a Sangathan man: "We will use Yashwant as a base to extend our influence elsewhere." Joshi is now set on capturing the Niphud SSK in Nasik, to which elections are due in October this year.

One of most keenly-fought elections was for the Kopargao SSK in Ahmednagar between Shankar Rao Kale, former state minister and Congress(I) man and his one-time ally Shankar Rao Kolhe, one of the most powerful men in the sugar sector. Kale is a follower of Maratha leader Y.B. Chavan and Vikhe Patil, chairman of the sugar cooperative federation of the state. Kolhe is the right-hand man of the chief minister. Kale won with the support of diverse groups including opposition members but Kolhe salvaged some of his lost prestige by retaining his hold on the Sanjivni SSK in Ahmednagar.

Vikhe Patil, the Congress(I) MP and an important sugar baron who last month issued a statement calling for Vasantdada's removal, tried to extend his area of influence with partial success. Panels supported by him defeated those sponsored by Vasantdada in at least two cooperatives but lost in some others. In Patan, Shivajirao Desai won his seat in the Balasaheb Desai SSK founded by his father by defeating Vikramsingh Patankar. He thus avenged his defeat in the Patan assembly by-election last year by Patankar, a Congress(I) rebel who was supported by the Opposition.

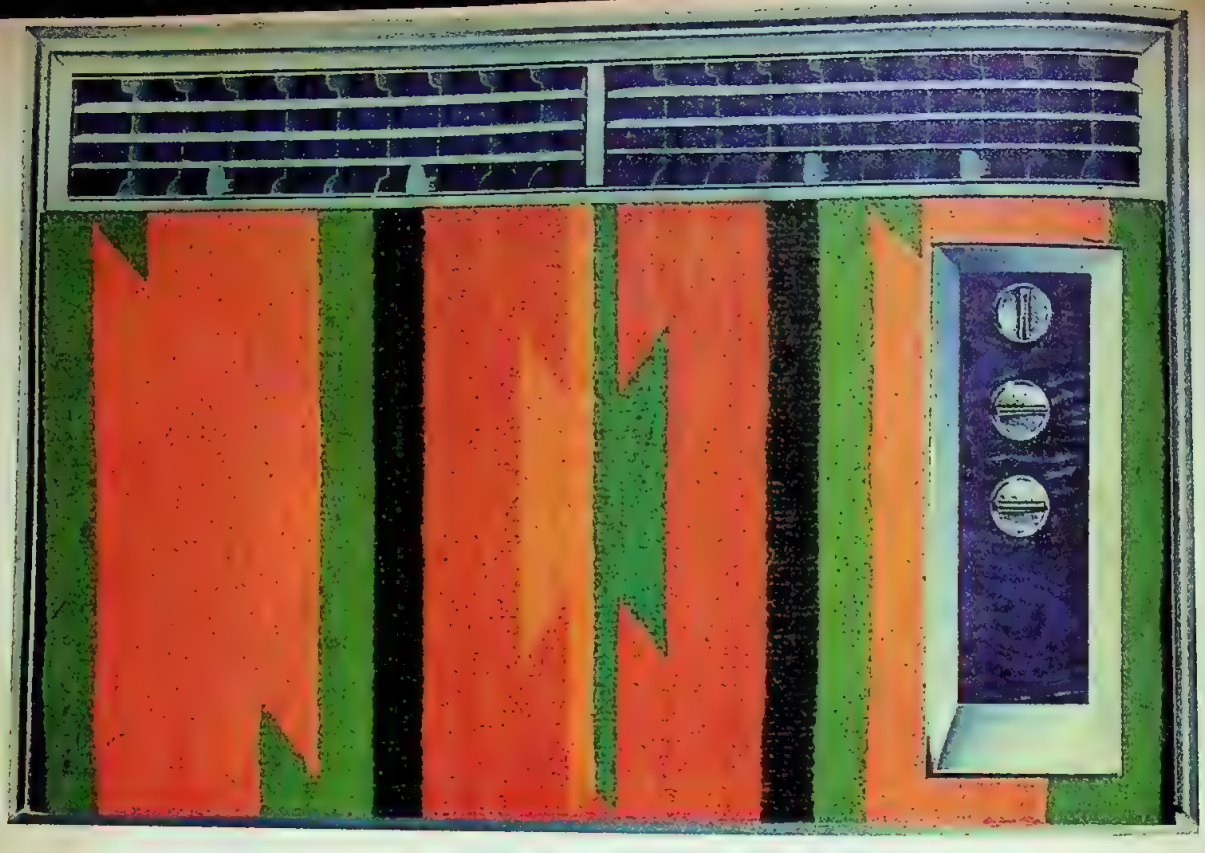
Baburao Dhakne, Janata MLA, won the Vrideshwar SSK in Ahmednagar district, dislodging the Congress(I) board which has held power there since the inception of the cooperative. The election has vindicated Dhakne, often considered a political lightweight and best known for creating a commotion in the Assembly last year by running away with the speaker's mace. In the election to the Shrigonda SSK in the same district, local Janata MLA Babanrao Panchpute unseated the founder-chairman of the factory, former Congress(I) MLA Shivajirao Magawade.

Jayant Patil, the 23-year-old son of the late state Janata Party president Rajarambapu Patil, was elected chairman of his father's fiefdom in the Walva SSK. Jayant, a civil engineer in Bombay who was brought into the fray as a compromise between warring sections, will now control the prosperous factory with a turnover of Rs 25 crore. In the process he has become not only the youngest sugar cooperative chairman in the state but also the most eligible bachelor in the Maratha community, with many politicians seeking his hand for their daughters.

Examples of senior Maharashtra politicians with a sugar connection are legion. The chief minister may be the best known but there are others at both the Centre and in the state. Union Deputy Minister for Communications Vijay N. Patil is de facto chairman of the Sanjay Gandhi SSK in Dhule. Shivraj Patil, Union minister of state for science and technology, controls the Jai Kissan Jai Jawan SSK at Latur. Planning Minister S.B. Chavan

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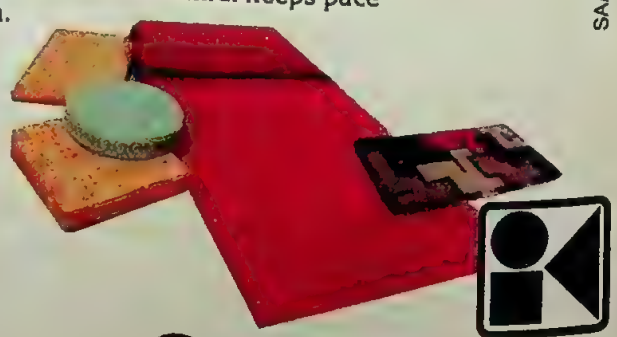
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Among the state ministers who have a hold on the sugar industry are Vijay Singh Mohite Patil, Minister of State for Irrigation, who controls both the Yashwant and Shankar SSK cooperatives in Sholapur and Minister of State for Cooperatives Abhaysing Raj Bhonsle, chairman of the Ajinkyatara SSK in Satara. Kalpa Awade minister of state for Industries and energy, is member of the Datta SSK board. Y.J. Mohite, MP, controls the Krishna SSK in karad.

Among opposition members, the former Maharashtra Janata Party president Rajarambapu Patil until his death last year controlled the Walve SSK for many years. The present state Janata chief heads the Satpude SSK in Dhule, and Congress(S) chief Sharad Pawar controls the Malegaon SSK near Baramati. Obviously, sugar and politics are very mixed in Maharashtra, though the resulting concoction is not to everyone's taste.

—COOMI KAPOOR

BANGALORE

Junket Joy

Elated politician at airport: *"My mission was an utter failure! I've got to go abroad again."*
Secretary to minister: *"Here is your schedule for the month sir, Uttar Pradesh after returning from the USSR, Kerala visit on the way back from the US and Madras after the UK visit."*
R.K. Laxman in *"You Said It"*

VETERAN cartoonist R.K. Laxman's barbs usually hit the bull's-eye and in this case he could easily have featured Bangalore's peripatetic Mayor S. Sunder Raj as the caricature for the above example. Even as Bangalore city's civic amenities deteriorate alarmingly, Raj has come under increasingly hostile fire for his globe-trotting jaunts. Said the *Deccan Herald*, Karnataka's leading daily, in an editorial dripping with sarcasm: "There is little to be done for a citizenry which does not understand that to improve Bangalore's roads, water supply, street lights, transport, garbage clearance, sewerage, etc, its mayor and alderman must of necessity go to New York, Tokyo, Outer Mongolia and Timbuctoo. These people are merely trying to serve the people and service, as we all know, costs money."

Notwithstanding that, last fortnight, Raj was airborne again to attend what was billed as an international conference on architecture and town building in an obscure city in Estonia in the Soviet Union. The actual itinerary, not surprisingly, also included Europe and the UK. Significantly, the fact that the conference was merely an excuse was amply demonstrated by the fact that Raj arrived at the venue in Estonia on the last day of the four-day conference.

It must be admitted, however, that Raj is merely following a tradition laid down by those elected earlier to ensure that basic civic requirements of the fast-growing city are met. Raj's case is all the more questionable since the post of mayor was revived only recently after a gap of nine years and his tenure extends only to August. But already, the 87-member city council in a recent meeting has agreed to send the next mayor to Osaka in Japan for an international conference on large cities even though the next mayor is still to be chosen.

Meanwhile, "study tours" to exotic locales continue to increase. Even those tours confined to within the country somehow manage to sneak across the borders. The standing committee on works rounded off a tour of cities like Delhi, Bombay, Jaipur and Panjim with a side trip to Kathmandu for shopping. Shortly after, the standing committee on taxation and finance sent in proposals for a team to attend a conference in Munich. When that was shot down, they proposed a tour itinerary that read like a travel brochure—London, New York, Washington and Singapore. That too was scuttled. Not to be easily daunted, a third proposal has been submitted which includes a two-day tour within the country after which they propose to visit Singapore.



Mayor Raj and a pot-holed Bangalore road: increasing criticism

MUSHTAQ AHMED



The foreign bug, according to available records, seems to have afflicted the city corporation since the early '70s. Mayors, administrators and commissioners have been on regular "study tours" of destinations like Honolulu, Milan, Adelaide and Seoul. That these were nothing more than junkets is illustrated by the caustic comment of BJP leader Ramachandra Gowda: "Not one of them has given a report on his tour. Even their expenditure account is not in the files," the peeved politician says.

The city's current mayor, thus, is only following well-trodden ground. But there is a vital difference. As long as Bangalore was a well-kept and well-run city, its citizens remained unconcerned. Now, with city services on the brink of breakdown and roads and garbage disposal in a sorry mess, suddenly the frequent junketing is being questioned. Says an irate Bangalorian: "When Raj took office, he pledged to leave an unforgettable mark of his presence. Considering his presence has been more visible abroad than in the localities of Bangalore city, he will certainly be remembered. But not the way he intended." —K. BHANUMATI

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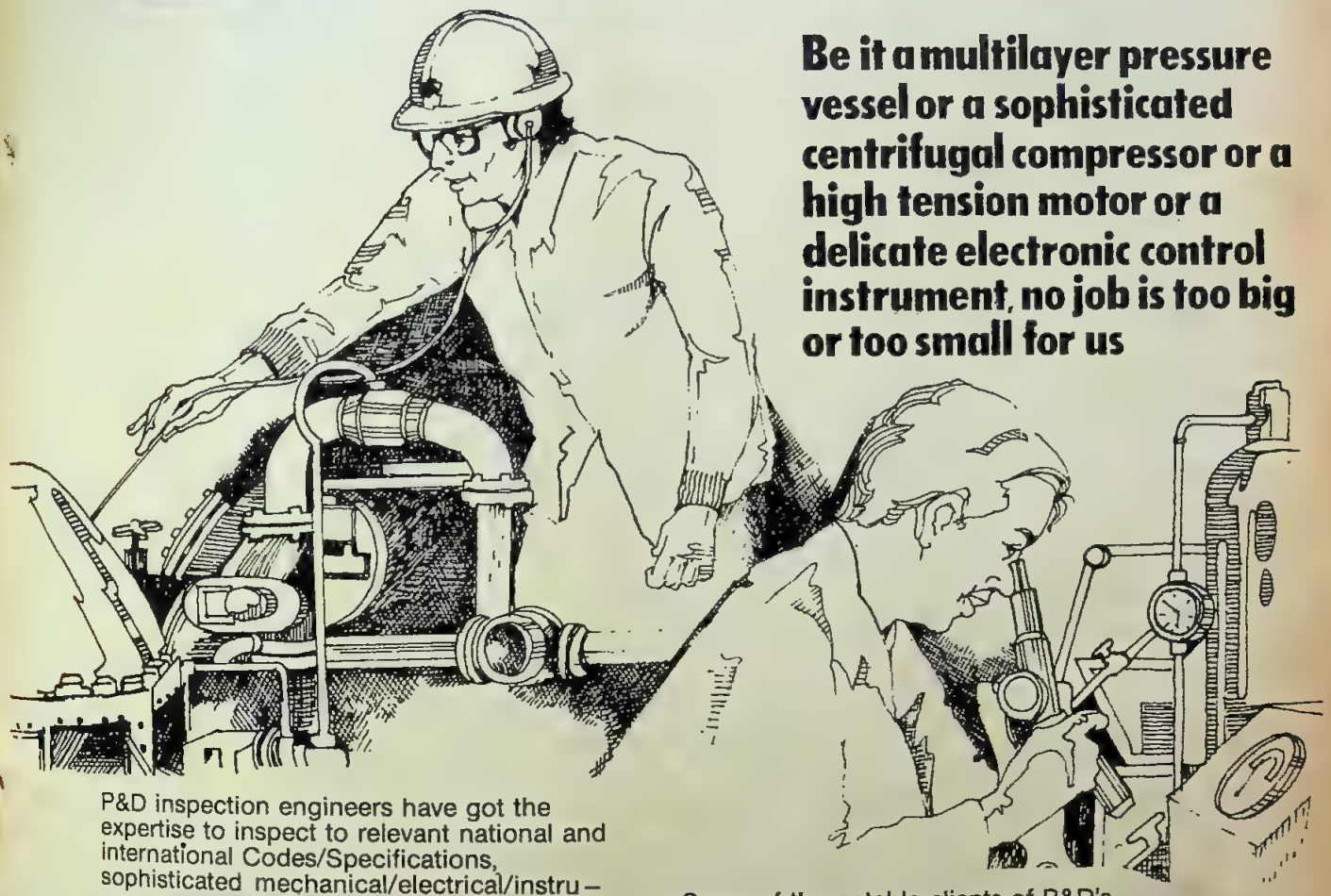
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PRABHAKAR RAO

Rama Rao being received at Hyderabad airport: "mission accomplished"

ANDHRA PRADESH

Return of the Hero



THE HERO of Andhra Pradesh has done it again. After a two-week whirlwind tour of the United States, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao returned home with numerous proposals for development projects designed to benefit his state. "It is like a sentimental story," said Rama Rao, overwhelmed by the reception he got on his eight-stop tour, aimed primarily at wooing non-resident investors. "I told them I had come as an elder brother and not as a chief minister to carry back bags full of dollars."

The reception at Begumpet Airport in Hyderabad was no less overwhelming. It resembled the welcome given to heroes returning after a great conquest or long years in exile. Bands hired by Telugu Desam legislators played for their foreign-returned leader and crackers were fired to herald the start of his journey home. At the same time—much to the dismay of civil aviation officers present—a large number of pigeons with Telugu Desam tags strung around their feet, were set off into the blue skies.

For Rama Rao, his trip abroad was certainly a busy one. In two very full weeks, the chief minister met Telugu scientists, physicians and businessmen in seven cities across the US. Dressed in saffron robes and armed with copper medals of Venkateswara to give away, Rama Rao appealed to Indian foreign residents to "partake in the uplifting of the economy of Andhra Pradesh". The chief minister was accompanied by at least 12 Andhra businessmen seeking collaborations on ventures in their state.

The first meeting in Pittsburg—organised by the Telugu Scientists Association and attended by about 250 Indian foreign residents—dealt with potential investment possibilities and the necessity to start humanitarian projects. According to T.L. Shankar, the industry secretary who accompanied Rama Rao, eight projects were taken as seriously viable. These include reinforced fibre glass, uninterrupted power supply systems, new types of transformers, manufacture of computers, software and magnetic tapes, the development of technology and transfer of computer chips.

In addition, there was talk of collaboration between the University of Pittsburg and the state of Andhra Pradesh to establish an institute of advanced studies that would make an exchange of specialists and technologies easier. Rama Rao presented awards from the Telugu Scientist Association to three scientists—Dr Y. Nayudamma, consultant to the United Nations International Development Organisation in Vienna and a scientific advisor to the Andhra Government; Dr Raja Reddy, director of the Institute of Robotics at Carnegie Mellon University and chief scientist of the Paris based World Centre for Computer Science and Human Resources, and Dr C.R. Rao, professor of statistics at the University of Pittsburg.

Although the chief minister had few concrete suggestions on what Indians living in the US could do, he took his appeal for contributions to many major cities. He said he was proud of Indians living in the US who contributed so much to American society. But, he pointed out: "After you have achieved a comfortable standard of living, what is the need to accumulate further wealth? It would be better for humanitarian purposes. Humanitarian projects undertaken at home will become immortal memorials to the donor as the Taj Mahal is to its builders."

At most places on his tour, Rama Rao visited Hindu temples and laid foundation-stones for yet more. At social gatherings, the saffron-attired chief minister, seated on a raised dais, handed out copper lockets and "mahaprasadam" (camphor and sandal paste) to women and children. Said a member of the delegation of what later came to be known as the "locket and laddu tour": "Rama Rao's religious postures really turned on the women and children."

Predictably, Rama Rao was awe-

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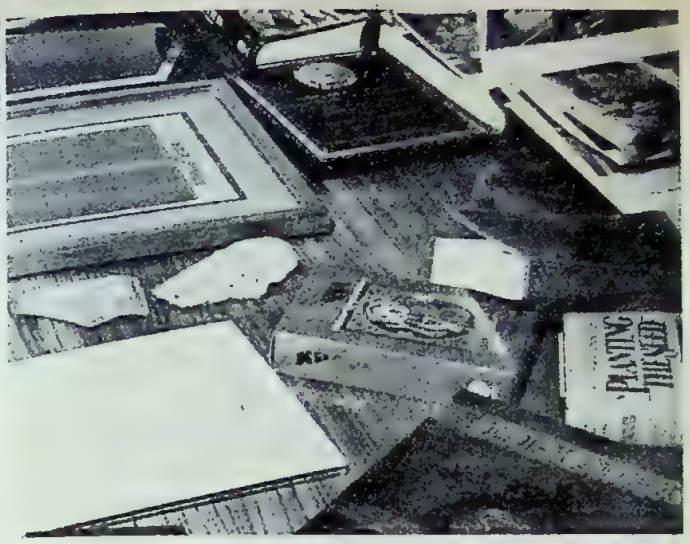
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struck by most things he saw on the trip. He vividly recalled the welcome given by Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse at Disneyland and marvelled at the fact that more than half its area is reserved for car parking. He was thrilled with the chancellor of the University of Pepperdeen in California inviting him to breakfast. Said Rama Rao: "Highways there are cleaner than our bedrooms and no one thinks of throwing a piece of paper on the road." Another eye-opener was the number of television channels. The former actor lamented: "Television is not a monopoly as it is here, and the Government does not poke its nose in television there."



Souvenirs from the chief minister's US trip

In spite of the excitement of his first foreign tour and the anxiety about the health of his wife and a grandson, who went earlier and returned after NTR, the chief minister succeeded in his wooing mission. Of the 650 potential investors Rama Rao and three officials met on the tour, 179 filed in response sheets indicating their area of interest in setting up priority industries in Andhra Pradesh. Total investment in these ventures is estimated to be about Rs 159 crore with dollar investment ranging between 5 and 15 per cent depending on the product and trade profile of the industry. Almost all those interested are in the 35-45 age group and many want to start electronic, chemical and engineering industries.

While the response sheet is only a general declaration of intention of the potential investor, the fact that so many of them have signed is a personal triumph for Rama Rao. Said U.S. Raghavendra Rao, special secretary to the chief minister: "His personal charisma and the manner in which he set the tone of commitment in his introductory remarks convinced them. They were stumped when we officials presented plans and charts about the potential for developing industries."

Of course much in the future will depend on just how the Andhra Pradesh administration decides to tackle non-residents' very genuine fears about the bureaucracy and the delays involved. Admitted B.P. Reddy, chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation: "We must provide the services through the much talked about single window instead of a bench. Our boys there will show greater interest if things move fast."

— MADHU TREHAN in New York
and AMARNATH K. MENON in Hyderabad

INTERVIEW

"People were so affectionate"

MEETING the press at his hotel in New York and later in an exclusive interview with INDIA TODAY*'s New York Correspondent* MADHU TREHAN, *Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao spoke at length on his mission to the US to woo non-resident Indian investment in Andhra Pradesh. Excerpts:*

Q. *Did you achieve the goals you set out for yourself on this trip?*

A. As a representative of my people I wanted to go to non-resident Indians to express our appreciation to them and appeal to them to think of their mother country and help it industrially.

Q. *But did you achieve anything concrete?*

A. Sentimentally they were very happy. People were so kind, so affectionate. Tears of joy rolled down my eyes, when I find their sentiments so nicely expressed.

Q. *But did they make any actual commitments?*

A. Two hundred response sheets have come to us. We have eight projects worth $40,000.

Q. *What kind of incentives are you offering them?*

A. We have reserved certain areas for foreign residents to develop industrial complexes as well as their abodes. Once they come we should quickly facilitate everything because they come with all their enthusiasm, then we should not say, we will think and all that. We have prepared everything. We are also requesting Hyderabad be made as a free port and an international airport, so that may also help the import-export trade.

Q. *You have many people expressing interest in establishing industry and business in Andhra Pradesh. But they will have to go to the Centre for licensing and permission?*

A. That is an internal matter. I cannot express myself in a foreign country about the total thing at large. I can't forget I am in New York and I am meeting the press here. So, no comments about the Union Government whom we respect.



Rama Rao: 'tears of joy'

Q. *What about the problem you had about bringing the silver medals to distribute over here?*

A. No, they are not made of the prohibited metal. We made them of copper. It is the sentiment and thought that counts. The spirit with which it is given is important. I'm not interested in getting special permission and all that. The Government has purchased it to give as gifts to children who come so what is there?

Q. *What about the dangers of foreign residents taking over companies in Andhra?*

A. They are also our people. Let them come over and take. That is business. What is wrong in it?

Q. *Foreign residents and Indians holding other passports have tax advantages that Indians living in India paying Indian taxes do not have.*

A. That is matter to be seen in detail. Our people should bring back their talent and know-how. What if there are any take-overs, let them. What is there? It should be for the benefit of the state. Not for individual benefit.



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ANDHRA PRADESH

Double Trouble



EVERY major policy move that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao makes somehow manages to snowball into a controversy. The latest example is the two ombudsmen appointed by the Government. Both are saddled with duplication of functions and the issue now being hotly debated is, who is the superior officer: E.V. Ram Reddi, the dharma maha matra (DMM) functioning on the basis of on order issued in May this year or Avula Sambasiva Rao, the lok ayukta appointed through an act of legislation in November last year.

Last month, the lok ayukta lodged a protest with the Government against the duplication of roles and the controversial order giving the DMM sweeping powers to check misconduct and maladministration. Sambasiva Rao also complained about the Government's indifferent attitude to his office. He said that a small staff and inadequate office space—the entire office was cramped into one bungalow—was hampering efforts to fight corruption. According to the lok ayukta the final investigation into 20 cases has been held up as the Government has not yet agreed to the use of officers and investigating agencies. Attempting to resolve these points of contention, the chief minister has asked the Advocate General K. Subrahmanya Reddy to examine the legality of the DMM's powers. The report is yet to be submitted.

Ever since the plan to appoint a watch dog to advise the Government in its well-publicised war against corruption was conceptualised, there have been problems. Created as a temporary post in February 1983—even the functions were not specified—the DMM was to be replaced by the lok ayukta when the Lok Ayukta Bill received presidential assent. Yet, even when the bill became law, Reddi was asked to continue at his post which had become superfluous. In May this year, 15 months after he began work, Reddi was given official sanction to call for files, enquire into public grievances, refer cases to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and discuss with its director if he differed with the formers recommendations. Also, any official who did not accept the DMM's orders had to submit to Reddi his reasons in writing.

Not unexpectedly, the order giving Reddi, a retired secretary of the state, such wide powers of control has created much resentment amongst government employees. B. Poornachandra Rao, chairman of the Action Committee of Employees and Workers, the coordinating group of all employees unions, said disparagingly: "Reddi is bringing the super era to administration. He is the super chief secretary for there are already 18 of the rank of chief secretary in the administration."

Incensed by the arbitrary nature of the functions which disregard earlier norms, a senior secretary to the Government said: "The order is absurd. It makes Reddi a secret investigator, secret prosecutor and even secret judge. There are no norms specified for making such an appointment or how a person abusing such vast powers can be removed." Added, S. Santhanam. officer on special duty, Centre-state relations: "What is the point in wasting time on an unconstitutional office held by a controversial person. It is a peculiar scheme where the benefit of doubt goes to the DMM."

Reddi nettled the bureaucracy further by recommending that the ACB search the homes of many officials including those in the IAS, for evidence of corruption. This immediately served the purpose of uniting them to resist implementation of an order they feel violated the principles of criminal law. The disaffected bureaucrats point out that the old order defining the powers of the DMM as an advisor to the Government on a three-year term, has not been withdrawn. Therefore, the new scheme which empowers Reddi to enquire into any matter covered by the executive powers of the state, contradicts the old where executive powers are regulated. For, as per the Government's business rules, an external agent like the DMM cannot call for files or ask for any information from any official. One of the officials, caustically commented: "We are no less concerned than the DMM about corruption. But honesty is not a virtue with him alone."

The administration also feels that the delegation of such arbitrary powers to the DMM can be used—if Reddi is willing—by the political executive to put pressure on government employees. A. Sreermulu, veteran government employees union leader cautioned darkly: "The Government will be wise if it withdraws the powers rather than allow it to be struck down by a court as it violates natural justice. This is a reminder of the role of Himmler in the days of Hitler."



A PRABHAKAR RAO



Lok Ayukta Sambasiva Rao (left) and DMM Ram Reddi: duplicating roles

To these accusations of witch-hunting and harassment, Reddi who is against any legal backing for the DMM as a statutory authority says: "What is the use of legal sanctions and complicated procedure. Those accused of corruption will get away by prolonging legal battles." As enamoured as the chief minister by the idea of rooting out corruption, Reddi wants his office to be made, a police station with powers of search, seizure and arrest.

Employees unions, however, are determined to oppose all such moves. G.M. Kasiviswanatham, president of the Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted Officers Association said: "Copies of the May order were not circulated to many offices and unions. Any government official with wide powers and no accountability will become an autocrat. We will resist the DMM's attempts to trample on employees rights." Calling for the DMM scheme to be scrapped, B. Swamynathan, president, Telengan NGO's Union added: "Reddi's honesty cannot be made a social



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menace. We want the DMM scheme abolished."

Under such fire Rama Rao's grand plans have come to nothing. Says Sambasiva Rao: "The concept of ombudsmen is not fully understood and appreciated. It is a slow process. But with a better understanding of the role by politicians and officials and the cooperation of the public and mass media it will grow." And so, presumably, will the controversy over the roles of the two ombudsmen.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

KERALA

Ungodly Crime



THE PROBLEMS of Kerala's young Home Minister Vayalar Ravi seem to have increased with the abnormal number of unsolved murders in the state. With members of the Opposition, the press and even a few men from his party demanding his resignation over this issue, Ravi has been caught in a pincer. Additional pressure piled up last fortnight with the arrest of Father George Cherian for allegedly murdering a 19-year-old college student Jolly Mathew from Kurichy in Kottayam district on April 27. The arrest has not only blown the lid off the sensational murder case but also exposed the religious and political nexus in the state.

The Jolly murder case was bound to be sensitive once it was revealed that Father Cherian, from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and a student of the Kurichy Homoeo College, was the prime suspect in the murder case. A report submitted by a police investigating team, under the direction of Deputy Inspector General, Central Range, Krishnan Nair, disclosed that the crime had taken place inside the church-run institution, the Bethany Ashram at Kurichy and accused Father Cherian and the head of the ashram Father Thomas of being the culprits in the case.

Strangely, the Government did not take immediate action over this revelation, fearing a backlash from the Christian community in the wake of the by-elections in the state on May 21. Simultaneously pressure was put on Ravi and Chief Minister K. Karunakaran not just by the powerful church authorities but the Malankara Syrian Church's strongman and local Congress(I) MLA Oommen Chandy. Chandy, in an effort to bury the findings of the Nair report, worked to have the case transferred to Siby Mathew, a superintendent of police in the crime branch.

With Chandy's backing, the Christian community in Kurichy alleged that the Hindu policemen in Nair's team were out to create a rift in their community, condemning at the same time the "questioning" of priests by Nair. Ironically, after Nair stepped down, Siby Mathew carried on his investigation only to reveal that his prime suspect was none other than Father Cherian. And with the permission of the Government and the church he arrested Cherian, who admitted to the crime, just two days before the monsoon session of the state Assembly started on June 18.

Although little material evidence has been recovered from the accused, the police claim to have "conclusive" evidence to prove that the murder was committed by Father Cherian. Cherian, an inmate of the Quilon Ashram Seminary and a vicar of two parishes in Quilon, was staying in the Bethany Ashram guesthouse during the course of his examinations. According to police sources, Jolly Mathew used to buy milk from the ashram farm. On the day that she was murdered, she came to the monastery to seek the blessings of Father Thomas and was intercepted by Father Cherian who invited her to his room on the pretext of examining her hall ticket which she had acquired for the examination. Once they had reached his room Cherian is alleged to have attempted to kiss her, whereupon she screamed for help. In an attempt to suppress her scream, he murdered her. Jolly, according to an autopsy report, had died of asphyxiation.





Jolly Mathew (above) and Father Cherian: sensitive issue

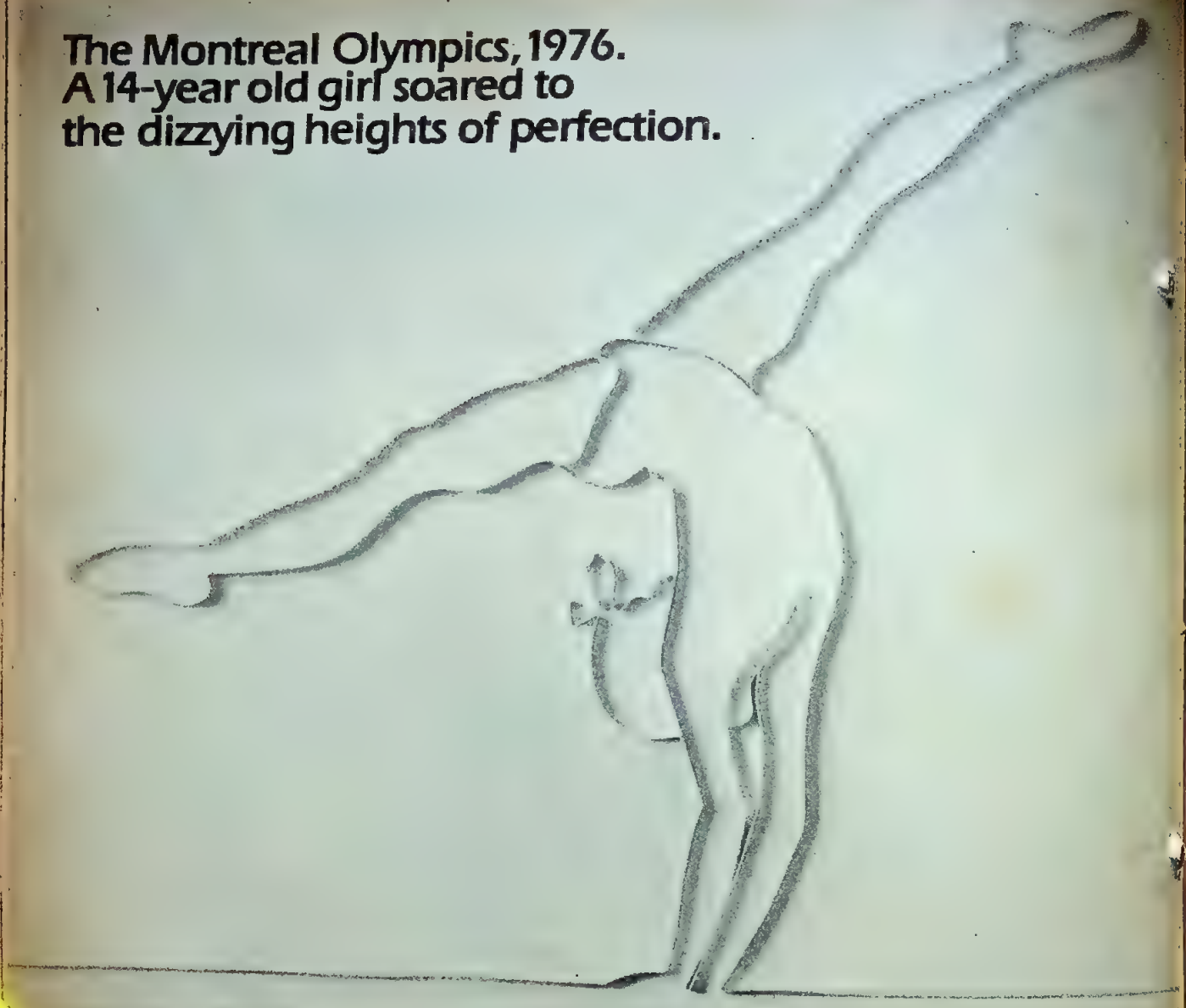
After the crime, Father Cherian apparently confessed to Father Thomas about Jolly's death, and fearing a scandal, he along with two employees of the ashram, disposed of Jolly's body in an unused well, from where it was recovered four days after the murder. Forensic experts claim to have recovered a strand of Jolly's hair and some drops of dried blood mixed with saliva, said to be sure indication in cases of asphyxiation.

A pall of gloom seems to have descended over the monastery in Kurichy. The Christian community in the area is stunned by the recent happenings. Father Thomas, who was also charged in the case but not arrested was indignant. Said he: "We are being framed by vested interests. It is a slur on the image of the Malankara church." He denied either Father Cherian's or his involvement in the Jolly murder. About the material findings by forensic experts from Father Cherian's room, Father Thomas dismissed them. Said he: "All of us have long beards and the hair that the police found is nothing but a small hair from a beard."

While Kurichy's church supporters are attempting to put a lid on the murder case, the Government, allegedly under pressure, has sent Siby Mathew packing off to Cochin and appointed him police commissioner there. Home Minister Ravi is refusing to comment on this move and about charges from various quarters that Chandy has pressurised him into not arresting Father Thomas. With the Jolly murder case still a sensitive issue and with powerful opposition politicians using every pressure tactic in the book, it will be a long time before Ravi sits comfortably in his chair.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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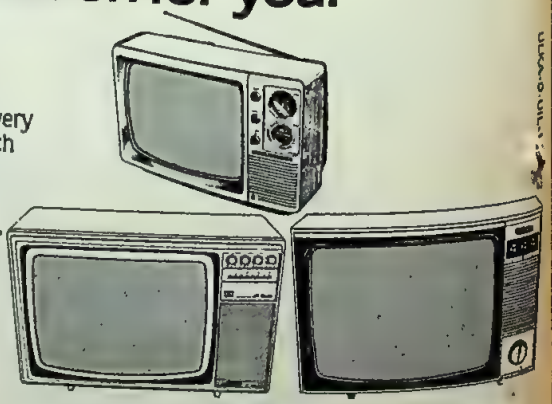
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UTTAR PRADESH

The Fast Shuffle



IT IS not unusual for police officials to be suddenly transferred to different areas, but last fortnight, the Uttar Pradesh Government made a decision unprecedented in the last four years: it ordered the transfer of over 30 senior superintendents and superintendents of police (SSP's and SP's), covering half the state's 57 districts.

The government officials attempted to explain these transfers as routine administrative orders but opposition leaders had their own views about the reshuffle. To them this was the ruling party's ploy to post reliable officials where they would be most useful during elections. Said Mohan Singh, chief whip of the Lok Dal in the state Assembly: "Chief Minister Sripat Misra has been very selective in effecting police changes. He has changed police officials only in those districts which are hostile to the ruling party." Retorted Ranjit Singh Judeo, minister of state for home: "The Opposition smells a rat in every administrative action of ours. Since transfers were done to strengthen police administration and improve the law and order problem, the opposition parties have become panicky."

Clearly, however, the latest police reshuffle is not entirely related to routine transfers. For the Congress(I), it is one way of explaining away its humiliating defeat in the Jakhania and Malihabad assembly by-elections (INDIA TODAY, June 15). When Chief Minister Misra's insinuation that some Congress(I) leaders had sabotaged the elections failed to cut ice with the Centre, his supporters to blamed the bureaucracy — including police officials — for tarnishing the image of the Government.

Misra decided to act right away. On May 31, the state cabinet created over half-a-dozen new posts of inspector generals of police (IG's), thereby raising the number of IG's to 22 and making every 10th Indian Police Service (IPS) official of the state an IG. To accommodate the increased manpower, the entire state was reorganised into five zones instead of four. While Onkar Sharma, a trusted DIG of police, Bareilly range was posted as IG of the same zone, another "dependable" police official T.S. Bhist who was working as DIG (Intelligence) was sent as IG of the Meerut and Garhwal police ranges, a newly created sensitive zone. An important feature of the reorganisation was the merger of dacoit-infested Agra, Kanpur and Jhansi police ranges into one zone. Surprisingly, the state Government, under pressure from the Director General of Police J.N. Chaturvedi agreed to entrust this zone to Som Prakash, an anti-dacoity expert. He too was made an IG.

BHAWAN SINGH



Misra (top), Judeo (left) and Chaturvedi: police politics

One week later — after the appointment of the IG's — Misra ordered the transfer of over a dozen DIG's covering important police ranges like Gorakhpur, Bareilly, Agra and Varanasi. While V.S. Mathur, DIG (Administration) was handed the coveted post of DIG, Kumaon police range, J.K.P. Singh, DIG PAC headquarters was given a field posting as the DIG of the Jhansi range. The state Government cancelled the earlier posting of M.C. Dwivedi, another DIG in the PAC. Since Jhansi is Judeo's home district, he was cautious in the selection of an official.

The top level changes now complete, the Government moved into the final phase of the reshuffle. In consultation with Chaturvedi and the newly appointed officials, new SSP's and SP's were inducted in the important districts. These changes covered not only the minority dominated districts of Moradabad, Meerut, Rampur and Agra, but also the crime-ridden areas of Gorakhpur, Deoria, Kanpur, Ghaziabad, Mainpuri and Azamgarh.

The changes in Deoria and Gorakhpur especially assumed significant political undertones due to mounting gangwarfare between the supporters of V.P. Shahi a Rashtriya Sanjay Manch MLA and Hari Shankar Tiwari, a pro-Congress(I) contractor with a criminal record. Police officials had been unable to take any action against gang members due to political interference. In fact, at one time Shahi started a dharna demanding the transfer of a local police official who, he alleged, was shielding Tiwari's men. Harbhajan Singh, a young IPS officer and SP of Deoria, filed a detailed report about the gang's activities and asked that the leaders be detained under the National Security Act. While Singh has not been transferred to an insignificant post in the crime department, he has been replaced by S.K. Tripathi, at present SP (Regional Intelligence). In Gorakhpur as well, SSP C.B. Satpathy has been replaced by I.P. Bhatnagar, SSP Meerut. With the exit of both Singh and Satpathy, the pro-Congress(I) gang is likely to revive its activities.

Surprisingly, while making these changes, the state's Irrigation and Industry Minister Veer Bahadur Singh who wields considerable influence in the region was not consulted. His supporters allege these transfers were designed to weaken his hold.

With that, one round of transfers seems complete, but a fresh round of changes at the level of circle officers, inspectors and police station incharges is likely to begin soon. Chaturvedi seems determined to insulate lower level police officials from political influence and has so far been able to manage it. But inquiries from MLA's have started pouring in — and with parliamentary elections only five months away — political considerations will outweigh any administrative justifications Chaturvedi and Judeo make.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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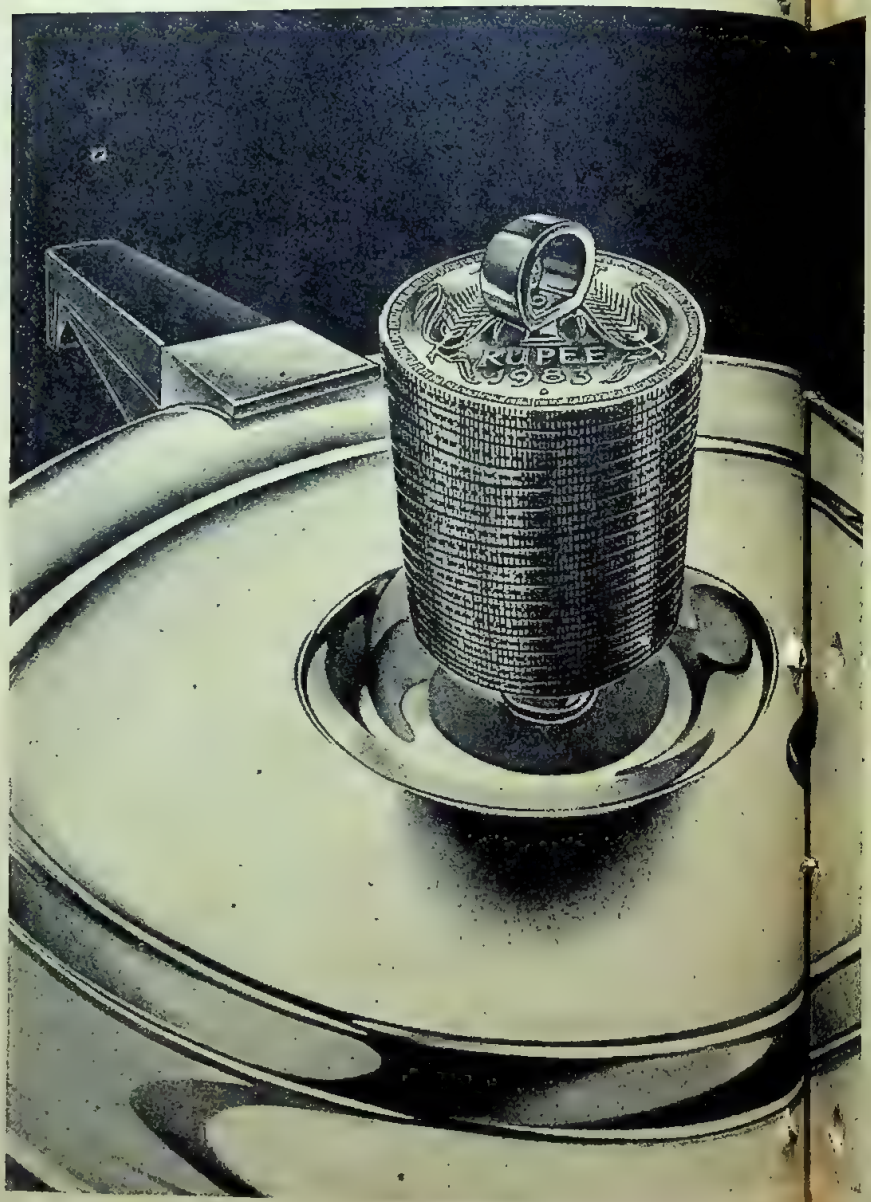
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NORTH AMERICAN SIKHS

The Voices of Protest

PERHAPS not surprisingly, the vocal backlash from the Sikh community after the army operation in the Golden Temple earlier this month was loudest outside the frontiers of the country. Virtually every Indian consulate from Montreal to Manila was the target of wrath as thousands of angry Sikh immigrants staged protests and, in some cases, attacks to decry the army action.

In many ways, the reaction was understandable. With the media clampdown on the operation by the Indian Government, Sikhs outside India were very often getting a distorted picture of the happenings through the sensational reports in the foreign press. To add to the problem, the protesters in almost all the western countries were given high-profile coverage by the local media which gave them a certain credibility they would perhaps not have enjoyed otherwise. A classic example is the highly inflammatory interview with Khalistan propagandist Jagjit Singh Chauhan (see following story), which was aired by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

What the protests also failed to indicate was the fact that it was the instinctive reaction of the Sikh community but bereft of any moderate opinion. A majority of the protesters may have been highly educated and prominent people but, like in India, the moderates among them have chosen to keep silent on the issue, possibly for fear of being castigated by the more extreme opinion-holders.

However, the fact that the protests were so widespread and angry cannot be ignored. Hopefully, reason will prevail and tempers cool with the passage of time. But as the following reports from Washington Correspondent INDERJIT BADHWAR *and* SURESH JAIN *in Ottawa indicate, at the moment the Sikhs abroad are not prepared to forgive the Indian Government for what they believe was a deliberate attempt to alienate their community.*

Thousands of Sikhs took to American streets to protest against the Indian army's action at the Golden Temple.

LAST fortnight the cities of Washington, New York, Los Angeles and Houston reverberated with cries of "Bole so nihal" and "Raj karega khalsa" as thousands of Sikhs took to the streets to protest against the Indian army's action at the Golden Temple. The most vocal among them demanded Khalistan and pledged to turn their backs on any negotiations with Mrs Gandhi's Government in New Delhi.

The moderates, for the most part, kept their own counsel. But it was abundantly clear that even the Sikhs who had not too long ago condemned the idea of Khalistan as a pipe-dream conjured by former Akali leader Jagjit



Singh Chauhan in 1969 were beginning to take the idea seriously and make public pledges to give financial and moral support to the movement.

At a demonstration on Washington's Massachusetts Avenue, 200 yards from the Indian Embassy on June 7, the heat was palpable. As the mercury hit 36°C that afternoon, several secret service men guarded the embassy while about 20 Sikh men, women and children carrying placards with signs such as "Death to Indira" and "Khalistan Now", chanted slogans. The women led the cheer with "we will get..." to which the men gave the rousing refrain, "...Khalistan". "Bole so nihal..." the salwar-kameez attired women screamed, and the thundering answer of "Sat Sri Akal" could be heard for four blocks.

Thermos-fulls of iced lemonade and plastic platefulls of puris and vegetables were passed around in a langar-like atmosphere. The demonstrators had arrived from Alexandria, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Houston and Boston. Said Dr Harbans Singh Azad, a wealthy businessman from Houston: "I feel extremely insecure now. I'm sorry, but for me India died on June 6. It is now only a stopover for me on my way to some place else. Formerly, the intellectual Sikhs were not with the masses but now they are."

On the podium, speaker after speaker condemned Mrs Gandhi, often in scatalogical terms. They recalled the memory of Baba Kharak Singh and the word *shaheed* was everywhere. "Previously we were not going for Khalistan but now we don't have any other choice," said Dr Hardeep Singh Ahluwalia of Houston. "Teach your kids, Khalistan Zindabad," shouted Mrs Harbhajan Gabri, whose husband is an engineer at the Bechtel Corporation near Washington. Their two young daughters Jasdeep and Mandip Kaur, who were born here, also demonstrated. "They've seen Punjab like a dream," Mrs Gabri said, "but they perform kirtan and *dono Punjabi datt ke boldiyan* (both speak Punjabi with gust)."

Lavleen Singh, a Delhi University student who now studies at the State University of New York spoke for the newly created Sikh Youth Federation of North America. An earnest and intense youngster, Singh said: "Send this message to Mrs Gandhi. She's playing a deadly game. We'll collect on all those deaths with interest." "We will negotiate only on the battlefield," added Dr Arjinder Pal Singh, lung disease specialist.

"I can understand their frustration,"



"The ball is now in the court of the Hindus. They now bear the responsibility of convincing the Sikhs to live with them."

—Ganga Singh Dhillon

said one diplomat. "They are wounded. Their sense of pride, their sense of destiny, their mythologies and their belief in their own fearless invincibility have been rudely jolted. They refuse to listen to anybody else at this time. But we can't ignore them, they are a powerful and influential community throughout the world and we can't just brush them aside."

THE SIKHS indeed form an influential lobby. Maverick Sikh activist Ganga Singh Dhillon, now head of the world-wide Nankana Sahib Foundation, has busied himself with organising dinners for members of Congress to impress upon them the ideas of a new organisation called the United Sikh Appeal.

Before and since the Golden Temple operation, Dhillon and his followers have been assiduously courting Senators Jesse Helms and Mark Hatfield and representatives Dante Fascell, Larry Winn Jr, Steve Solarz and Gus Yatron. Helms and Fascell are chairmen of their respective house foreign relations committees, and Yatron is chairman of the human rights subcommittee.

Sikh activists are trying to get Yatron's committee to hold possibly damaging public hearings on human rights violations in India by spreading the word that a pro-Moscow government in India is out to stamp out religious minorities—the bulwark against the spread of communism—in India just as the Soviets have done in their southern flank and in Afghanistan.

Dhillon said that the Indian Government has held secret negotiations with him for two years. He claimed he had several meetings between October 18 and 20, 1983, with Research and Analysis Wing chief Ram Nath Kao in Brussels at the Europe Hotel where Kao, acting as Mrs Gandhi's representative, said that the Indian Government had agreed to concede the main Sikh demands.

Under a special arrangement, Dhillon was scheduled to visit Delhi in December 1983 for further talks. The official reason for his visit was that he would attend the World Punjabi Conference organised by Dr Gurnam Singh Tir. Dr Tir assured Dhillon—who has previously been refused entry into India—that "we have moved diplomatic channels for facilitating entry". In addition, the Indian Embassy in Washington granted entry visas for that period to Dhillon's wife and children. The visit was aborted following questions raised in Parliament.

Dhillon says: "The ball is now in the court of the Hindus. They now bear the responsibility of convincing the Sikhs to live with them. If they don't do this, mark my humble words, the die is cast. Remember, the last time I spoke to INDIA TODAY I predicted a *jwalamukhi* and that is precisely what happened because you would not understand our craving for our cultural identity. So long as the Sikh lion is wounded it will never rest. All Sikhs abroad are committed to the welfare of their roots... The immediate steps we are demanding are withdrawal of the army; guaranteed safety of Sikhs; an impartial inquiry under UN supervision; and a UN supervised referendum on what Sikhs want." A large number of formerly moderate Sikhs are flocking to Dhillon's banner.

Deedar Singh Bains, a California-based multimillionaire farmer who owns more than 10,000 acres of orchards and agricultural land, says he is now committed to the formation of Khalistan. Bains friend of President Zail Singh, was at one time considered for an honour by Mrs Gandhi's Government.

"My only solution now is Khalistan," said Bains. "Before this raid happened, I was not too much for it. I don't want to be prime minister or hold any other office. I just want to make sure that the Sikhs are protected against Russian designs that the Indian Government follows. Mrs Gandhi plays the Russian

game. Sikhs from all over, whether they are five years old or 100 years old, are calling me and telling me—tell us what you want us to do. I say to India, pull the army out and cool things down."

Dhillon said in an interview that he had been in regular telephonic contact with Bhindranwale and his aide Rachpal Singh "and believe me it is wrong to say that Bhindranwale did not want *samjhauta* (settlement) with the Government. He told me on May 27 he was ready to talk." That was the same day, he claims, that Trilochan Singh Riyasti, an emissary for the Government, met Bhindranwale's deputies and told them privately that the prime minister was willing to concede their demands.

On the streets and in many Sikh homes and gurudwaras across America, a new mythology is emerging around the memory of Bhindranwale. He is being depicted by Sikh parents to their children as an innocent martyr who was labelled an intransigent terrorist by the unsympathetic government propagandists.

However, it would be incorrect to presume that the entire Sikh community in the US is militant. Balbir Brar, a founding member of Washington's main gurudwara, is a highly successful builder and land developer with award-winning designs to his credit. "Bill" Brar, a moderate who has never supported Khalistan, said that he was personally at a loss to figure out what other choice the Government of India had. "The whole event is unfortunate and it has inflamed the Sikhs. My fervent hope is that this doesn't hurt Hindu and Sikh interrelationships. We have now to begin the healing."

Brar maintains that there is considerable moderate opinion that so far has not publicly surfaced because of tremendous peer pressure and one-upmanship. "In each community there are elements always interested in seeing extreme things happen and many moderates are being condemned as *gaddars* by other Sikhs."

On the Khalistan issue, he says: "Even if I were totally for Khalistan, which I am not, it is still not a viable solution." He said it would be sad if Bhindranwale is revered as an eleventh guru. "Bhindranwale himself had problems with the Nirankari Sikhs because of their belief in an eleventh guru. Then what difference is there between him and the Nirankaris? I assure you as passions cool down, the moderates will be heard."

Rajinder Sharma, who works for the US army, is the Washington coordinator for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He advocates patience. "The Hindu community should create a new dialogue with the Sikhs," he says. "Right now, they're hurt. But they should realise that no matter where we come from and no matter what passport we hold, India is the mother."

Sharma believes that American Sikhs are now isolating themselves from the rest of the Indian community. He noted that during the last Baisakhi festival in America, for the first time Sikhs refused to invite Hindus for the celebration. Observers note Hindu worshippers in gurudwaras have dwindled to a trickle.

"The whole event is unfortunate and it has inflamed the Sikhs. My fervent hope is that this doesn't hurt Hindu and Sikh interrelationships. We have now to begin the healing."

—BALBIR BRAR, Builder and Land Developer

"The Hindu community should create a new dialogue with the Sikhs. Right now, they're hurt. But they should realise that no matter where we come from India is still the mother."

—RAJINDER SHARMA, US Army

The official Indian stand was expressed by Ambassador K.S. Bajpai in an interview broadcast on June 5. When asked, "Do you want to take the terrorists dead or alive?" the envoy answered: "We are hoping that this is something we can manage with the minimum use of force and I don't think that somewhat melodramatic way of putting things is entirely reflective either of our intentions or the actual situation. Naturally, we would like to put an end to terrorism and if in that process some lives are lost, it has unfortunately been forced on us. But there is no such sort of aim that we have to get them dead or alive as though this is some kind of wild west show."

Meanwhile, hundreds of Sikhs in Canada have been protesting in front of the Indian High Commission in Ottawa and the country's two consulate offices in Toronto and Vancouver. In Vancouver, two of the protesters entered the consulate building, smashed photographs of national leaders, and broke everything they could lay their hands on before the police arrested them. Some of the staff members barricaded themselves with furniture.

"Naturally, we would like to put an end to terrorism and if in that process some lives are lost, it has unfortunately been forced on us."

—K.S. BAJPAI Indian Ambassador

IN A rare show of unity, groups of Sikhs converged on the consulate office in Toronto. The demonstrators screamed "Blood will be revenged with blood," as they burnt the Indian flag and threw shoes at a caricature of Mrs Gandhi. While uniformed police and plainclothesmen blocked the entrance to the offices, a youth sneaked in and vandalised the place.

In Ottawa, hundreds of Sikhs assembled in front of the Indian High Commission but the security was tight and no one was allowed close to the building. Wielding swords and kirpans, the demonstrators then marched to Parliament Hill. Police photographers were seen filming the episode from the roof-tops of nearby buildings.

In Toronto the slogan-shouting leaders included Gurdeep Singh Nagra, vice-president of the Guru Singh Sikh Sabha temple on Old Weston Road, and Pritam Singh Sian, president of the Shiromani Singh Sabha temple on Pope Avenue. Both of them spoke in favour of creating Khalistan.

Ironically, on another occasion, members of the same two temples in Toronto clashed in front of the consulate offices, leading to gunfire in which two people were killed and a police officer injured. At that time the members of the Old Weston Road temple demonstrated in support of Khalistan, while those from the Pope Avenue temple shouted in support of Mrs Gandhi.

The power struggle between the two temples and among members of the congregations in each of them itself has a long history of violent confrontations. In March 1982 the internecine rivalry led to shooting at Osgoode Hall, the seat of the provincial Supreme Court, in which a lawyer and a Sikh were killed and another

Sikh crippled for life. The alleged assailant, Kuldip Singh Samra, one of the most wanted men on the police list, has been absconding since then.

Another strange development in Canadian Sikh politics is the new alliance between them and the Muslims. Asaf Shuja, general secretary of the Federation of Pakistani Canadians, was one of the many Muslims to join the demonstration in front of India's consulate in Toronto. He said his people will join another planned demonstration and the Sikhs will join a rally to be organised by his federation. The Muslims are accusing the Congress Party of deliberately allowing Hindu-Muslim riots to occur, in which they allege the minority communities are the greatest sufferers. They refer to the most recent riots in Bhiwandi.

It has been known for a long time that the Sikh agitation in Punjab was largely being bankrolled by North American Sikhs who number nearly 250,000. Of these more than 150,000 are in Canada. The Khalistan movement originated in North America and its organisers have printed thousands of Khalistani dollar bills, stamps and even issued passports. According to Darshan Singh Saini, one of the organisers of the movement who holds a ministerial rank in the so-called Khalistani government-in-exile, great deal of money was pouring in to support the movement.

But the unity among members of the Sikh community created as a direct result of happenings in Punjab has come as a boon to the police authorities in Toronto. A police officer who is familiar with local Sikh politics said Mrs Gandhi's actions may have set ablaze parts of India but it had done wonders for the law and order situation in Canada.

According to senior officials in Ottawa, while most Sikhs in Canada were law-abiding, the community was ill served by the conduct of a violent minority. They say it is natural to protest but to protest violently in Canada, was neither natural nor an acceptable mode of behaviour.

A spokesman for the Federation of Canadian Sikh Societies said that more than 250 Sikhs, mostly from the Vancouver area, were said to be trapped in Punjab and their fate was not known. He said the federation has strongly urged Ottawa not to deport some 300 to 400 Sikhs who came to Canada and sought refugee status for fear that they would be persecuted on return. More than 2,500 Sikhs, who came staking their claims to refugee status, have already been deported to India in the last two years.

UNITED KINGDOM

Hardening Attitudes

KHALISTAN josh main jal raha hai aur hum akeley nahin rahenge" (Khalistan is on the boil and we won't be isolated). This more sad-than-sorry statement by Sanpuran Singh Cheema, president of the Southall Akali Dal and by any yardstick a moderate Sikh, sums up the UK Sikh reaction to the military operation in the Golden Temple.

The event—more than any single act concerning the subcontinent in recent times—has united the British-Indian Sikhs in direction and purpose. The direction is violently anti-India and Mrs Gandhi. Cheema like Giani Amolak Singh, president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Committee of Britain, a Longowal man and hitherto the leading Sikh figure in this country has been swept away by the flood of anger and hatred that is convulsing the Sikh community of Britain. "There were no moderates any more, only those who want to separate," Giani Amolak Singh said, "and in this situation no one can dare raise a voice against separatism or speak in favour of moderation." Echoing the sentiment Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan, the wily arch-priest of Khalistan who is the principal beneficiary of the current mood, gloated: "Khalistan has come, I say, no one can stop it."



Chauhan (right); Youth Congress(I) supporters protesting against Chauhan's BBC interview in New Delhi

Curiously the Sikh youth—the people hitherto most indifferent to the politics and rituals of the community—have been the ones most outraged by what happened in Amritsar. Shaven young men and girls in jeans, have been the most vocal and violent in the many demonstrations held in Britain recently. "Suddenly they've become Sikhs," said one awed Punjabi in Southall, "and they are more wild and volatile than anything we have seen so far."

Certainly they have been in the forefront of the demonstrations, each time drowning out the voice of moderation and physically suppressing those who tried to raise it. Their demand for 'representation', on the gurudwara management committees was too much even for the orthodox extremists. The idea was rejected out of hand. But the young Sikhs have won a singular tactical victory. They are now dominating the five-man 'Khalistan Action Committee' set up on June 23 in Southall to define the path of the panth—a committee that is being rapidly endorsed by every



gurudwara in Britain.

Dr Chauhan, following in the footsteps of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, has cleverly capitalised on the emotions of the outraged youth. They have become his base. And while he was forced to dissolve the 'Khalistan government in exile' announced in London with considerable fanfare on June 12, he did cleverly manipulate his appointment as head of the 'Khalistan Action Committee'.

British official and public reaction to these events has had a strongly anti-Indian bias. High Commission officials who had been knocking on the doors of the Foreign Office found their complaints and information about demonstrations and violence falling on deaf ears. But if the security provided by the Government is now at spectacular levels—the High Commission in Central London is barricaded and guarded by police—the British Government has yet to crack down on what one Indian official said were "blatantly unfriendly acts" being done in the name of Khalistan.

For one, there is no end to the threat to Indian establishments and personnel here. For another, demonstrations continue apace without the kind of official response seen in the case of the South African Embassy where pickets are being arrested and removed for, of all things, breaching Article 21 of the Vienna Convention which enshrines the sanctity of diplomatic missions.

BUT THE British Government is taking a serious view of the advertisements that appeared in the Urdu press in Britain offering rewards to would-be assassins of Indian government leaders. Scotland Yard has referred the advertisements to the director of public prosecution (DPP) who will decide whether the advertisers should be prosecuted for incitement to murder.

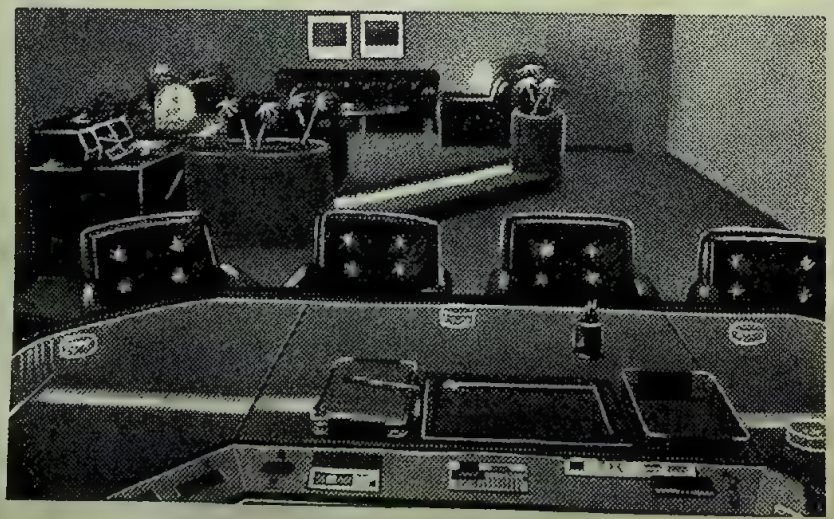
Dr Chauhan was featured on the popular *World At One* lunchtime BBC radio programme calling for the killing of Mrs Gandhi and those responsible for the army's entry into the Golden Temple. Action has yet to be taken on the Indian complaint in this matter, as also complaints about the hysterical public incitement to violence published daily in Pakistani-owned Urdu newspapers. There is ample evidence that much of this is being orchestrated by the Pakistani Embassy. In fact, the presence of the official concerned with the press has been noted at the meetings of Sikhs and Muslim Kashmiris.

Cooperation between Khalistan Sikhs and Kashmir Liberation Front functionaries in fact was another significant development last fortnight in London. Because the Kashmiris in Britain are under close scrutiny, two Kashmiri activists of the Liberation Front travelled from Copenhagen last fortnight for a meeting with Sikh activists in Southall. The result, according to a reliable source, is the formulation of a plan to stimulate anti-Indian trouble in Kashmir to divert attention of the Indian Army. This may be a bit far- fetched for a London-based group, but it indicates the trend for expatriate Sikh and occupied Kashmiri Muslim cooperation in anti-Indian matters.

Meanwhile, a 151-member International Council for Khalistan representing expatriate Sikhs in Britain, Canada, the US and other countries is scheduled to meet in London around July 26 to supposedly elect a new 'Khalistan government in exile'.

—ANTHONY MASCARENHAS in London

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INDO-GERMAN RELATIONS

Bonn Appetit

NEW DELHI could well be the capital city of the entire Third World," a German expert on South Asia jocularly remarks about the elephantine conferences held in the recent past in the Indian capital. But the remark, notwithstanding its light-heartedness, comes close on the heels of a lively debate on the pressing need for a fundamental shift in Bonn's assessment of India's key role in world politics.

Speculation about a change in Bonn's policy vis-a-vis India was fuelled by an article which appeared recently in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, an important national German daily, which occasionally does indulge in overt criticism while comparing her to Pakistan and China. Bonn was reviewing its assessment of India's role in the international scenario and about to launch an offensive to court her in an effort to achieve wider consensus on political issues. The emphasis of Bonn's policy, which had been on bilateral cooperation in the economic, scientific and cultural sectors, would now shift to political issues.

The *Plannungsstab*—"think-tank" the German Foreign Office was of the view that India was a country on the way to becoming a big power and consequently deserved to be treated accordingly. It was myopic to consider only China as the big power of Asia. The article chastised the Budgetary and Development Policy Committee of the Bundestag (parliament) for being tight-fisted on releasing further aid to India on the ground that she spent a lot of money on armament. However, the article maintained, the *Plannungsstab* had taken up the cudgels for India which was spending only 3 per cent of the GNP on armament, compared to China's 9 per cent.

Another point highlighted by the *Plannungsstab* is India's nuclear strength. While China was already a nuclear power and India had only the technology to become one and the armed forces were at least technologically at par with the numerically superior Chinese armed forces whose armament comprised of completely outdated arsenal, the Indian armed forces were in possession of modern and highly sophisticated planes, tanks, anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, a large part of which was produced or assembled under licence in the country itself. There have also been unconfirmed reports in circulation that India was seeking alternative partners for cooperation in nuclear technology, necessitated by the American reluctance to supply fuel for Tarapur. It would appear that the Indians had already sent feelers to the Germans for possible cooperation in this sector.



Mrs Gandhi with West German Chancellor Kohl: reviewing relations

There were also other areas where India could match China in political importance, so runs the German argument. If China was a permanent member of the Security Council, India was a leading force in the Non-aligned Movement and a "voice of reason" in the North-South dialogue. India's role, as a matter of fact, appeared more important because Soviet designs to separate Baluchistan from Pakistan and penetrate into the Indian Ocean could be frustrated only if it maintained her "genuine non-alignment" and if mutual trust and goodwill existed between India and Pakistan.

The Indian subcontinent, which had hitherto been largely spared the global East-West conflict, was being increasingly drawn into this superpower dichotomy following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. German analysts feel that India is also uneasy about the Soviet presence in Afghanistan even though she was reticent about openly condemning them. Its efforts at improving relations with the US and also her close rapport with France—Mrs Gandhi's "personal chemistry" with President Mitterrand is often cited here as exemplary to foster bilateral relations—have been the direct product of the situation in Afghanistan.

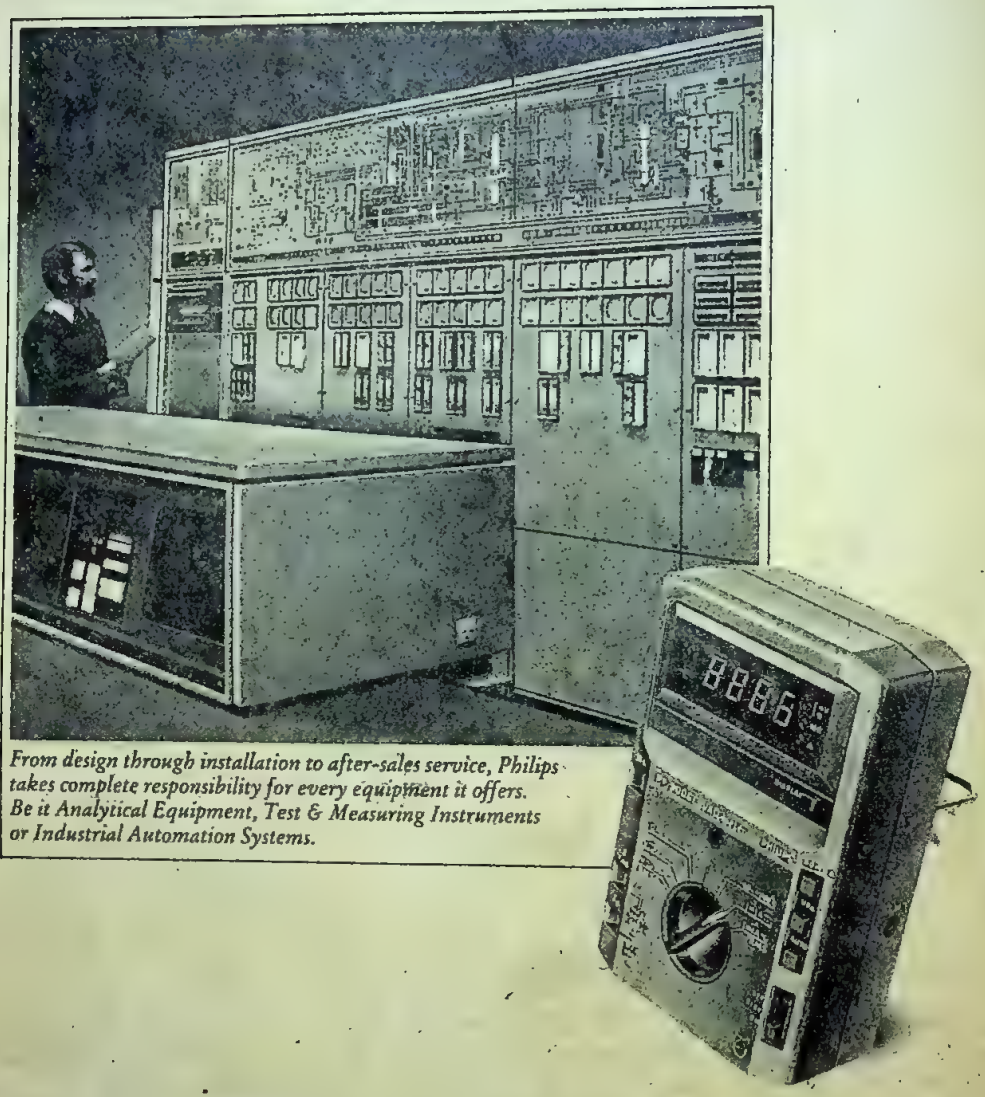
India was also not lagging behind China on the economic front. While it is a fact that economic and social justice left much to be desired in India and while China—at least officially—claims that not a single Chinese "goes to bed on an empty stomach", India possessed a large industrial base and had risen to become the ninth industrial power of the world. It had also achieved a certain degree of independence in the food sector and had not been so badly mauled by developments in the world economy, as had been the case with many other countries of the Third World. It produced computers and satellites, and set up her own atomic power stations. The per capita income of $240 of the 700 million Indians was not trailing far behind the $290 of the one billion Chinese, to go by the World Bank figures.

And German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, has been taking pains to harp at almost every banquet hosted for visiting politicians from the Third World: "We support genuine non-alignment in the Third World ... this is the best course developing countries can pursue to achieve the ultimate goal of peace and prosperity."

This remark applies particularly to India which, in spite of her limitations, is seen by the Germans as a torch-holder of moderation in the turbulent sea of Third World militancy. The transition from the radical course of Fidel Castro to the moderate one of Indira Gandhi, as articulated at the New Delhi meeting of the Non-aligned Movement, pleasantly surprised many German observers. Indeed, the Iran-Iraq war, which necessitated the shifting of the venue of conference from Baghdad to New Delhi, proved to be a blessing for the West which had felt the pricks of the anti-western darts thrown by individual members of the movement, with Cuba manipulating to divert the movement from its professed course into an anti-western front. Even though the concept of non-alignment may not exactly be the West's cup of tea, it is nevertheless seen in Bonn as by far the lesser evil to an underdeveloped region of the

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world sliding into the Marxist-communist abyss.

BUT INDIA's image as the "largest democracy of the world", as its diplomats religiously recite abroad at every available opportunity, offers the biggest pull for the West. India strikes the same wavelength with the West on the concept of a politically liberated society with all the concomitant signs like a thriving private sector despite an inflated public sector, democratically elected parliament and a free press. Except for a pause of less than two years during the Emergency, it has honoured her commitment to democracy since Independence. And this commitment has earned her many—cynical and also genuine—admirers in the West and envious onlookers in the Third World where democracy has been raped and strangled by tinpot dictators and totalitarian regimes.

India continues to maintain her plum position as the largest recipient of German development aid; she will receive some Dm 360 million in 1984 as against Dm 337 million in 1983. There are also many projects that are supported by the Germans under the framework of Indo-German technical cooperation. India's performance at the Hanover Fair in April also fetched rave notices in the German press. The steady stream of visitors—be it economic experts, politicians, scholars, scientists and artistes—in both directions bears testimony to the intensity of bilateral relations. Chancellor Kohl's brief stopover in New Delhi last November should be seen as part of this offensive. However, Mrs Gandhi's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany is long overdue and should have coincided with the opening of the Hanover Fair.

There are also basic dissimilarities between the two sides, as can be expected with countries of such wide socio-cultural, geopolitical and strategic diversities. An oft repeated German complaint is that India tends to take a self-righteous moralising attitude towards the Federal Republic of Germany which many Indians wrongly see as a caged parrot of the US. Germans pursue what they describe as "German interests"; the geostrategic and political idiosyncracies have made it impossible for them to change tracks under the present circumstances.

Many Indians fail to realise that the Federal Republic of Germany is firmly embedded in the western alliance and is first and foremost a European country which has to protect its interests against and oversized and powerful Soviet Union; the present system of deterrence offered by the western alliance restrained the Soviet Union from gulping down the other half of the German nation.

India, on the other hand, would like to see herself treated as an equal partner. The coverage given to it by the German press and media, for which officialdom cannot be reproached, follows the usual trail of corpses, beggars, mass-starvation and natural and man-made calamities. Despite these irritations, many German officials have been speaking in flattering terms about India's potential. "A big power of the future, ranking at par with China" and "Indo-German relations ought to be filled with more political content similar to Indo-British or Indo-French relations". Even if there are no signs of the much discussed *wende* ("change") which Chancellor Kohl had promised in his election campaign after 13 years of social-liberal coalition government, observers from both the countries look forward to another positive *wende*.

—MANIK MEHTA in Bonn

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ZIA-UL-HAQ

"Pakistan is not involved"

IN THE wake of the army's action in the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar and Punjab last month, there were reports in the media hinting at possible Pakistani complicity in the Sikh terrorists' bloody agitation for Khalistan. The Indian insinuations have drawn vehement protests from the Pakistan Government. The resultant exchange of protest notes between New Delhi and Islamabad appeared to stall, even if temporarily, the already slow process of improving relations between the two countries. Last fortnight, in view of the seriousness of the Indian charge, INDIA TODAY *approached Pakistan's new Ambassador to India, Dr Mohammed Humayun Khan, with a somewhat unconventional request for a telephonic interview with President Zia-ul-Haq. Dr Khan readily passed on the request to his government. Six hours later, General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq spoke from his home in Rawalpindi to Senior Editor* S. VENKAT NARAYAN *in New Delhi. The exclusive telephonic interview, unprecedented in the troubled history of the Indian subcontinent, lasted 40 minutes during which the 60-year-old General answered questions on a variety of subjects with natural courtesy and infinite charm and patience. "I am speaking to you from my heart," he told Narayan. Excerpts:*

Q. ***The weapons that were seized from the Golden Temple in Amritsar and elsewhere in Punjab during the past few weeks bear Pakistani and Chinese markings. Is your government involved in any way in assisting the Sikh extremists in India?***

A. After we heard of such allegations from the Indian side, our foreign office issued a very categorical denial. Our foreign minister, while passing through London, was asked this question and he has said that Pakistan has no hand in this; these allegations are false and baseless. Pakistan is a state which does not believe in Machiavellian practices. We have certain norms of inter-state relationship. We would not like anybody to interfere in our internal affairs. Similarly, we have neither tried nor have we thought of interfering in the internal affairs of India. Allegations of Pakistani involvement are wrong, baseless and false.

Q. ***If your government is not directly involved in helping the Sikhs, could it be that the weapons are coming into Punjab from across the border through smugglers, Afghan Mujahedeen, illegal arms dealers or through any other non-Pakistan government sources?***

A. Such a thing should not be possible. We have a large border. All the border is not totally sealed. Just before this incident, the Indians had tried to seal the Pakistan-India borders as effectively as possible. As you are aware, the Border Security Forces were replaced by regular troops. We did not react at all to this because we felt very confident, assured and grateful that the Indian authorities had cared to consult us beforehand. A few months ago, we had detected and hauled up a gang of smugglers, caught in the process of smuggling gold and weapons to Pakistan from India. If this can take place, obviously the converse too can happen. Even in such an eventuality, it is not possible to smuggle weapons from Pakistan into India in such large quantities and thus enable India to categorically allege that Pakistan is directly or indirectly helping somebody to create disturbance inside India. It is not possible.

Q. ***Could it be that over a period of time this has been going on and the extremists have collected a large number of weapons?***

A. It may be possible because these days gun-running between Pakistan and India is as common as anywhere in the world.

Q. ***The* CIA *is suspected to be sending weapons to the Afghan Mujahedeen in Pakistan. Do you think that the* CIA *may be possibly involved in smuggling any arms into Punjab from Pakistan?***

A. Your assumption that the CIA is involved in arming the Mujahedeen in Pakistan is wrong. If this is correct it is not within my knowledge. If it is not within my knowledge, no weapons can pass to the Afghan Mujahedeen through Pakistani territory. I see no reason why the CIA should be interested in arming somebody in India to create disturbances. Recently, I met Vice-President Bush. He had come to Pakistan after his visit to India. I want to tell you that I have never heard such a categorical statement from anybody so reliable and so highly placed as Mr Bush. He stated to me that it is the United States's firm policy and belief that they want to strengthen India, they want to have very good relationship with India and they are looking forward to a better US -India relationship. I see no reason why, on the one hand, Vice-President Bush tells me this and on the other hand the CIA should be involved in arming the Sikhs. It doesn't go well.

Q. ***How serious is the problem of smuggling across the Indo-Pakistan border? Has it ever figured in bilateral talks between the two countries? What are the measures***



Pakistan is a state which does not believe in Machiavellian practices. Allegations of Pakistani involvement are wrong, baseless and false.

being contemplated to check the smuggling of gold, hashish, weapons and so on?

A. This problem is fairly serious. Smuggling does take place across the borders. This has been discussed at most of the bilateral meetings. According to an agreement, the two Border Security Forces are honour-bound and duty-bound to check smuggling. They are allowed to keep contact with each other in order to help in providing necessary information and to ensure that smuggling is checked in time and, if detected, the individuals are apprehended. There is a good coordination between the two Border Security Forces and this point has been discussed at the diplomatic level practically in all the meetings. We have been continuously trying to see that such practices of smuggling across the two borders are at least minimised, if not totally checked.

Q. *Could it be that some disgruntled elements within Pakistan who may not be well disposed towards your government are doing this to cause you embarrassment?*

A. I can assure you that nobody from the Pakistan side could be involved.

Q. *Your government's refusal to comment on the recent developments in Punjab because it is India's internal matter has been appreciated here. But Ganga Singh Dhillon has been claiming close friendship with you, thereby implying that you are actively helping him. What is the nature of your friendship with him? How many times did he meet you? Have any other pro-Khalistan elements like Jagjit Singh Chauhan ever met you? If they did, what did they ask you to do for them and what did you tell them?*

A. (Laughs). I have never met or talked to Mr Chauhan in my life. I have not met Ganga Singh Dhillon for the last two years. I met him initially through a common friend. This was a few years ago. I only met him as a Sikh yatri who had come to visit holy places in this country. Every time he has come as part of a delegation he has met me and on all such occasions the Indian ambassador has also been present. When I was in the United States of America I met him there also. But we never discussed amongst ourselves what Dhillon or the Sikhs should do in India because I believe in principles and I try my best to follow what I speak and to practise what I preach.

Q. *The Pakistan radio and television have lately been putting out stories that appear designed to incite the Sikhs into rebellion. Some of their recent reports, like the mutiny in Amritsar, are baseless. Both your radio and TV are controlled by the Government. Don't you think a bit of restraint on their part in a situation like this in a neighbouring country would go a long way in bringing about Indo-Pakistan amity?*

A. I keep my eye on both radio and television not because the Government controls them. They are autonomous bodies, but they follow the policies and broad guidelines given by the Government. We have an understanding with India that both the media organisations of India and Pakistan should not do anything contrary to the broad accepted policies of the two governments. Why should Radio Pakistan be going all out to broadcast reports against India?



I only met Dhillon as a Sikh yatri who had come to visit holy places in this country.

Q. *But there must be some truth in the Indian protest?*

A. The other day somebody asked me a question: Will this situation in Punjab and the allegation of India against Pakistan affect Pakistan-India relations? I said no, because Pakistan is on a peace offensive. Pakistan wants to normalise relations with India. I can assure you that Pakistan radio and television are responsible and reliable organisations. They will not broadcast reports which could be misconstrued intentionally or unintentionally.

Q. *Some of your missions, in Europe and the United States, are reportedly contacting Sikh radicals in a bid to incite them against the Indian Government.*

A. This is also totally wrong, baseless. The Government of Pakistan has decided on a policy of having good neighbourly relations with India irrespective of India's internal problems. How can you expect that the embassies of Pakistan would be following a policy contrary to this? Not possible. I think these are unfounded suspicions, perhaps misguided information sent by exuberant intelligence agencies.

Q. *You are yourself a Jalandhar-born Punjabi. What is your own perception of the Punjab agitation?*

A. I was born in Jalandhar but I am a very patriotic Pakistani. I am now a Pakistani and I am now a son of the soil. Whatever was there we left it for you to look after and as far as the situation in Punjab is concerned, I am one of those persons who is never happy at somebody else's trouble. We had gone through some very serious trouble like this internally not only now but even when East Pakistan was a part of us. I see no reason why Pakistan should feel happy about any of India's difficulties. We wish you all the best and I hope that the Indian Government in its own responsible manner will solve its internal problem and will try to bring cohesion among various minorities of India, including the Muslims who are a very large minority.

Q. *There are many Indians who sincerely believe in Indo-Pakistan friendship. But they are worried about reports of so-called Pakistani complicity in the trouble in Punjab. What do you propose to do to clear such doubts?*

A. I do not think that the Government of India can be that



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categorical and that sure that Pakistan is involved. Please tell them that Pakistan would never do such an irresponsible thing. Pakistan was never involved in anybody's internal affairs leave alone those of India, a country which is our very close neighbour and with whom we are trying to develop our relations and improve them as much as we can.

Q. *Your government has complained of India about training camps for the Al-Zulfiqar along the border towns in Punjab. The Indian foreign secretary has already denied this allegation during his last visit to Pakistan. He has invited your foreign secretary to visit any place he wishes to visit in India to check this out. Do you seriously believe that Indians are assisting the Al-Zulfiqar group?*

A. We had received very categorical information. We checked it and then we brought it to the notice of the Indian Foreign Office. This was discussed by the two foreign secretaries. We felt assured when Mr Rasgotra assured our foreign secretary that there is no such thing. That time onwards we told the Indian foreign secretary that we accept his word. We hope there are no such camps now and that India will make sure that there will be no such camps in future.

Q. *Do you fear any threat to your government from members of the Bhutto family?*

A. I am a humble believer in Islam and I do not fear anybody. I only have fear of God. I only try to do my best and perform my duties as conscientiously as I can and leave the rest to God.

Q. *Miss Benazir Bhutto had said that she will try to foil the elections you propose to hold next year in Pakistan.*

A. I heard that one but I don't think any sane or intelligent politician would make such a statement. We will make sure that the elections are held and that they are free and fair.

Q. *Will you let Benazir Bhutto into Pakistan if she wishes to return? If you do, will she be punished for her statements abroad?*

A. We are not a barbarian society. We claim to be an Islamic state. We don't just hang people without any crime and if somebody makes mistakes there is a course of law which takes them into account. Personal whims do not play any part in Pakistan.

Q. *But can she come into Pakistan if she wishes?*

A. She is most welcome to come back any time she likes. We didn't force her out of the country. She went on her own accord for her medical treatment. This is her country.

Q. *You said some months ago that you are not available to fight the election in Pakistan. Have you changed your mind lately?*

A. There is no change as yet. When there is a change I will give you a call myself.

Q. *It seems to me that the bitter memories of Partition, the Kashmir dispute and the Bangladesh war continue to torment the Indians as well as the Pakistanis. How much longer do you think it will take us to forget all this and get down to living as friends?*

A. It will take as long as you and I and the common man and the responsible persons will take to forget it. The sooner we turn the chapter over and forget the past and start with a fresh page without apprehensions, the better it will be for both India and Pakistan.

Q. *If you were in the shoes of the prime minister of India what are the three most important things that you would do to improve relations with Pakistan?*

A. I have no grudge against the efforts of the prime minister of India. I think Mrs Gandhi is doing her best. We appreciate her efforts. We hope that such an effort will continue and will not temporarily be marred by short-sighted compulsions of the forthcoming Indian election. I have nothing to suggest to a very shrewd and experienced politician like Madam Gandhi.



I have nothing to suggest to a very shrewd and experienced politician like Madam Gandhi.

Q. *Do you get the feeling that Mrs Gandhi's regime is somewhat cold to you for any reason? Do you think she may have been more cordial to you if you had been an elected president of Pakistan?*

A. I never felt it. I never had such an inferiority complex! I have always been grateful to Madam Gandhi for all the respect and understanding that she has given me in spite of the fact that I am not an elected president.

Q. *What are your views on South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC)?*

A. I am an ardent supporter of SARC. I am hopeful that SARC will be as good an organisation as the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

Q. *When are you coming to India next?*

A. Any time, India is our neighbour. I have no inhibitions. Whenever there is a suitable time, I would be there. But for the time being we are expecting that either Madam Gandhi or anybody else would find it convenient to visit us in Pakistan as soon as possible.

Q. *Have you extended a personal invitation to the Indian prime minister?*

A. Yes, she has an invitation from me. Also her son.

NEPAL

Indian Obsession



THERE is no anti-Indianism in Nepal that can bite but there is a huge Indian obsession verging on paranoia, and it originates in the royal palace where it is also kept under reasonable control. The enormity of Nepal's dependencies on India predictably produces a persecution and deprivation complex. And it takes a sharper edge when Nepal feels that it is under some compulsion to assert its independence of India, much as an adolescent in his late teens feels towards a dominating father. "India doesn't understand the compulsions of a small, backward, land-locked sovereign state like Nepal," asserts the neo-nationalist Nepali intellectual, whether he works in the beautiful campus of Tribhuvan University or the shapeless inelegant structure that houses the two leading government newspapers, *Gorkha Patra* and *Rising Nepal*.



And when one talks with diplomats in the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, a sprawling 57-acre complex whose upkeep must be costing the External Affairs Ministry a pretty penny, one hears the opposite refrain: "Nepal does not understand the compulsions of a large nation like India." The two nations, bound together by a thousand bonds, not all of them silken, talk a lot at each other, but not much to one another. Indians are poor listeners when it comes to the neighbours. The Nepali intellectual, burdened with the Indian obsession, believes he must make himself heard rather than hear what the Indians have to say.

Foreign Minister Padma Bahadur Khatri asserts that Nepal has a right to follow its own foreign policy and that Nepal has done nothing to harm Indian interests.

India deals with Nepal with a diplomatic mixture of goulash and gravel. India's contribution to Nepal's development is much larger than that of any other external power — over 50 per cent of all development aid received. In spite of strong incentives given by the Government to encourage exports to countries other than India, 60 per cent of Nepal's trade is with India. Above all, Nepal has an ecological linkage with India which the neo-nationalist Nepali intellectual resents but can do nothing about. As much as 79 per cent of Nepal's land resources belongs to the Himalayan ranges, while its "lifeline", the 21 per cent *tarai* or plains border India. India gives specialist training to 200 Nepalese every year, a far larger number than by any other country. In fact, two-thirds of Nepal's 1,200-odd engineers have been trained in India.

Though Nepal is theoretically less dependent on India now than it was two decades ago — 60 countries are listed as its "trade partners", while Bangladesh has offered it port facilities at Chittagong and Chalna — in reality, India can, if it wants to, choke off Nepal's trade and commerce with the rest of the world. But its land-locked position is creating fewer problems for Nepal since 1978 when the Janata regime in Delhi conceded Nepal's long-standing demand for separate trade and transit treaties. The transit treaty was extended for five years in March 1983. Wrote Lok Raj Baral, Nepal's noted political science scholar, "the warmth with which the treaty was continued was unprecedented". Nepal's abundant water resources are being used for development of both countries as a result of Nepal-India cooperation. The World Bank has provided $10 million for a feasibility study of the Karnali hydel power project which, when completed, will meet much of the power demands of northern India as well as western Nepal.

Indians wish to talk endlessly about the goulash side of Nepal-India relations. The Nepalese focus on the gravel. They perceive the 1950 treaty of peace and friendship to be "unequal": it "unilaterally" placed Nepal within the Indian security zone in South Asia. "You treat us as if we are a state of India and not a sovereign nation," remarked a leading journalist, "your protection makes us a target of China."

Indian security posts guard Nepal's "open" border with Tibet. This is another sore point with some Nepalese. Indeed, the new urban Nepali middle class, small in number and psychologically insecure, wish to see their country equally loved and protected by India and China. When they talk about "equidistance", they mean equal closeness, though they do realise that geography and geopolitics have sentenced Nepal to a life term of closer relationship with India than China. King Prithvi Narayan Singh, founder of modern Nepal, described the kingdom as "*tarul* (yam) between two stones." The present monarch, Birendra, has hit upon the concept of Nepal being accepted by the world community as a "zone of peace". "Forty governments have supported the idea," declared Nepal's India-educated Foreign Secretary, Bishwa Pradhan, and he listed them with unconcealed pride, regretting at once that India was not so far one of them. India, he hastened to point out, had not turned down the peace zone concept. "It is under consideration," Indian diplomats tell their Nepali counterparts whenever the issue comes up. "We have not asked for UN or NAM support or approval of the peace zone concept," Pradhan added, "we are only bilaterally sounding out different governments." King Birendra, however, has placed the concept at international forums. "There are no big foreign policy problems between Nepal and India," allowed Pradhan, who has authored several books on Nepal's foreign policy including one entitled *Nepal as a Peace Zone*. Indians link the peace zone concept to the 1950 treaty and even though segments of the Nepali public resent the treaty, the monarch has given a categorical assurance that the peace zone concept would respect all existing treaties.

The fact is that on almost all foreign policy issues and some domestic issues in which India has a gut involvement, Nepal is out of step with its large neighbour. The merger of Sikkim frightened the Nepalese in a way Indians can hardly understand. When the Nepalese see a cartoon in a major Indian newspaper depicting Nepal as the next candidate, they are not amused. The Nepal Government has not so far supported the Indian stand on Kashmir which, in Kathmandu's perception, is still a "disputed" issue between New Delhi and Islamabad. On Afghanistan and Kampuchea, Nepal has taken an unequivocal-

ly anti-Soviet and anti-Vietnamese position. Its criticism of the US invasion of Grenada was rather mild; its enthusiasm for an international conference to limit great power naval activity in the Indian Ocean is at best tepid.

How does Nepal expect India to support the zone of peace concept and contribute whole-heartedly to Nepal's development when Nepal is not willing to support India on any of the major issues in which India is involved? To this question, Nepal's Foreign Minister Padma Bahadur Khatri's answer was an emphatic rhetorical assertion of Nepal's independence and sovereignty. Nepal has a right to follow its own foreign policy in defence of its own national interests, said Khatri, 70, a retired major-general, who seemed to reflect the thinking of the neo-nationalist intelligentsia. Nepal has done nothing to harm Indian interests, he asserted, pointing out that Nepal did not object to Gurkha soldiers fighting on the Indian side against China in 1962. "What we have done for India is seldom recognised", said Khatri, "we are blacklisted all the time."



Other government leaders were much mellower while commenting on Nepal-India relations. Prime Minister Chand stated emphatically, "We have no problems with India." Finance Minister Prakash Lohani felt Nepal-India relations were as smooth as could be expected in the existing circumstances, and he found it easier to communicate with Indian ministers than with some of the Indian bureaucrats. In fact, he commended Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee for his understanding of Nepal's problems. Pasupati Rana, minister for water resources, claimed that his generation of politicians were less obsessed with India and China than the earlier generations.

The Indian Ambassador, H.C. Sarin, with his background of 13 years as defence secretary and governor of several troubled states, did have an image problem for many months.

THERE is considerable support among the educated middle class for Nepal not getting involved in disputes and quarrels among South Asian nations. This was Khatri's main argument defending Nepal's "neutral" position on Kashmir. Nepal, he pointed out, was the second nation after India to recognise Bangladesh as a sovereign nation. The peace zone concept too enjoys widespread support among the Nepalese. It was approved by the late B.P. Koirala, though some of the present leaders of the banned Nepali Congress have withheld support mainly because one of its clauses (No. 7) would forbid India to allow Nepalese nationals to carry out political activity on Indian territory. Indian acceptance of the peace zone concept would undoubtedly remove the single heaviest strain on India-Nepal relations, but neither Mrs Gandhi nor the foreign office bureaucracy appears to be favourably inclined to the idea. In an indirect manner, however, Nepal is a kind of peace zone. India has declared that it would regard an attack on Nepal to be an attack on India. So has the Chinese Government at least once through one of its eminent spokesmen. If that does not make Nepal a zone of peace, what else can?

A new source of tension between Nepal and India is what the Nepalese call international immigration, and which means the free movement of people across the open Nepal-India border. Bishwa Pradhan repeatedly stressed that, if not handled with mutual understanding and statesmanship, this could lead to a future crisis. The "hottest" document in Kathmandu today is the "summary and recommendations" of the task force on migration which was appointed by the national commission on population in 1982. Known as the Gurung report—it is not an illuminating document and can be faulted on many grounds. It was certainly a big mistake to club internal and international migration together. According to a survey carried out by the task force, 6.9 per cent of the household heads in the ten *tarai* districts are immigrants. However, 44.6 per cent of the "footloose migrants in industrial and construction localities" are immigrants, and so are "40 per cent of border commuters entering Nepal for economic reasons". The report shows that though large numbers of Indians enter Nepal as transient workers or for short-term trade or business purposes, there are few Indian residents. The number of Nepalese entering India for jobs, work and business is certainly larger than the number of Indians entering Nepal. The Gurung task force has recommended several measures to keep a count of people moving across the border and even to introduce the passport or identity card system. Some regulation on population movement has already been enforced. The Nepalese are sore that the entry of their countrymen through several checkposts on the Indian border in the Darjeeling region has been banned.

Despite these relatively small strains on political relations between Nepal and India, the two are undoubtedly the friendliest among the South Asian seven. An Indian is accepted by the Nepalese more naturally and with greater gentleness than he is in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Among the leading politicians too, many would not like to place the relationship with India under strain. Surya Bahadur Thapa, former prime minister, for instance, managed Nepal's relations with India more deftly and amicably than has the present Government. The large segments of the people who are sympathetic to the Nepali Congress are more friendly towards India than supporters of the Panchayat systems' present government faction. Whatever the private feelings of ministers, the Government takes great care to handle India with extreme caution. The Gurung report, Prime Minister Chand disclosed, had not been considered by the Cabinet. "It is not a government report," he said emphatically.

The Nepalese elite is asking for better Indian understanding of the peculiar predicament of this most backward of South Asian countries which has produced its first MBBS only in 1984. Most Nepalese see New Delhi's attitude towards Nepal to be "imperial". The late Phanishwar Nath Renu once wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru describing the Indian ambassador in Nepal as "the arbiter of the fate of the people of Nepal". The Indian "rajdoot", he wrote, regarded himself as a "maharajadhiraj". The current ambassador, H.C. Sarin, certainly does not belong to that type. But with his background of 13 years as defence secretary and a "tough" governor of several troubled states, his appointment to the office of Indian ambassador to Nepal did create an image problem for many months. However, Ambassador Sarin has now settled down, and Chand acknowledged that the "line of communication" with India was "open and smooth". However, the same cannot be said of the relationship.

POWER

Groping in the Dark



IN NEW YORK city, some years ago, the entire power system broke down, an event so traumatic that the question "Where were you when the lights went out?" became a part of local folklore. Here, in contrast, the collapse of a whole power grid—that ultimate nightmare of modern society—is almost a monthly occurrence. Late last fortnight, the Gujarat grid was entirely knocked out, plunging the whole state in darkness—and fetching just a couple of paragraphs in the next day's newspapers. A few months ago, all of Uttar Pradesh was paralysed when the giant power station at Obra—the biggest in the country—caught fire. The flames raged for 48 hours, there was virtually no power anywhere in the state, and the consequent power cuts were as high as 80 per cent. Two units of 200 mw each were completely gutted, and three others seriously damaged.

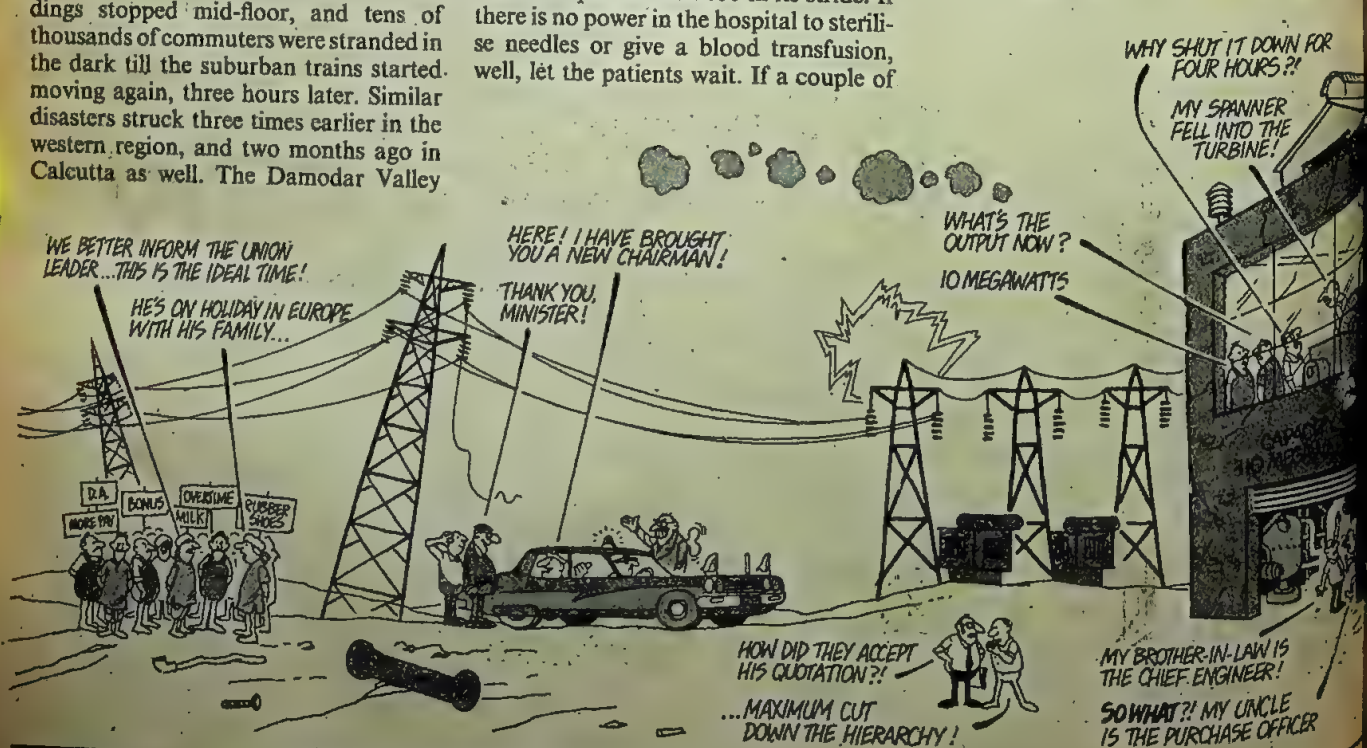
Some weeks earlier, it had been Maharashtra's turn. A grid failure brought life in Bombay to a standstill as trains screeched to a halt, lifts in high-rise buildings stopped mid-floor, and tens of thousands of commuters were stranded in the dark till the suburban trains started moving again, three hours later. Similar disasters struck three times earlier in the western region, and two months ago in Calcutta as well. The Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC), which feeds both West Bengal and Bihar, failed to maintain the frequency at which it is supposed to supply electricity. The Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation (CESC), shut off its own units to save them from damage that the dip in frequency could cause; and in the inevitable domino effect, the West Bengal State Electricity Board did the same. Result: total breakdown, and a heightened crisis for a week.

Crisis is routine, breakdowns commonplace, and fires in power stations almost an everyday affair. The Obra fire last October went out of hand because, as it turned out, fires were a monthly occurrence there and no one took the initial warning seriously. Since then, there have been two more fires in the state's power stations: at Panki and Harduaganj. At the latter, three years ago, there had also been the extraordinary sight of a turbine flying out of its housing and going straight through the roof of the turbine-generator hall. An emergency valve had failed to function.

A society known for its fatalistic acceptance of all calamities has somehow taken the power crisis too in its stride. If there is no power in the hospital to sterilise needles or give a blood transfusion, well, let the patients wait. If a couple of them die while waiting—as reportedly happened some months ago in Delhi's Jayaprakash Narayan Hospital—there is still no anger. But the travails of a people that both have electricity and don't have it—perhaps the only such in the world—tell of a national scandal.

A.R. Meenakshi, a student at the "plus two" stage who shifted recently from Calcutta to Madras, has discovered that she still has to study by candle-light every now and then. And the proprietor of Becco Steel Castings Private Ltd in Bhilai has this record of one day at his factory last year: the power went off at 6.25 in the morning for 20 minutes, then at 8.30 for 25 minutes, then again at 10.30 for an hour, and at 12.30 for another hour. Going on through the day, there was a break in supply for 20 minutes after 1.40 p.m., an hour after 2.15, an hour and 25 minutes after 5.25, half an hour after 7.30, a further half-hour after 9.30, then briefly after 10 at night, and finally for 20 minutes after 11.10. Thus, 11 times during the day, there had been no power for a total period of over seven hours.

In Calcutta, M.C. Agarwal drives



from his trading office in north Calcutta to his home in the south at lunch-time every day. But his flat is up on the 10th floor of a high-rise apartment complex, the lift is usually inoperative because there is no power, and Agarwal can't climb up because he is a heart patient. So, every now and then, his lunch is brought down to him, and he eats it in the car before driving back to work.

In Tamil Nadu, Mettur Chemicals has given up hoping that it will ever get enough power from the state electricity board to run its silicon manufacturing plant. So the whole plant will now be shifted to Andhra Pradesh, where there is no power shortage.

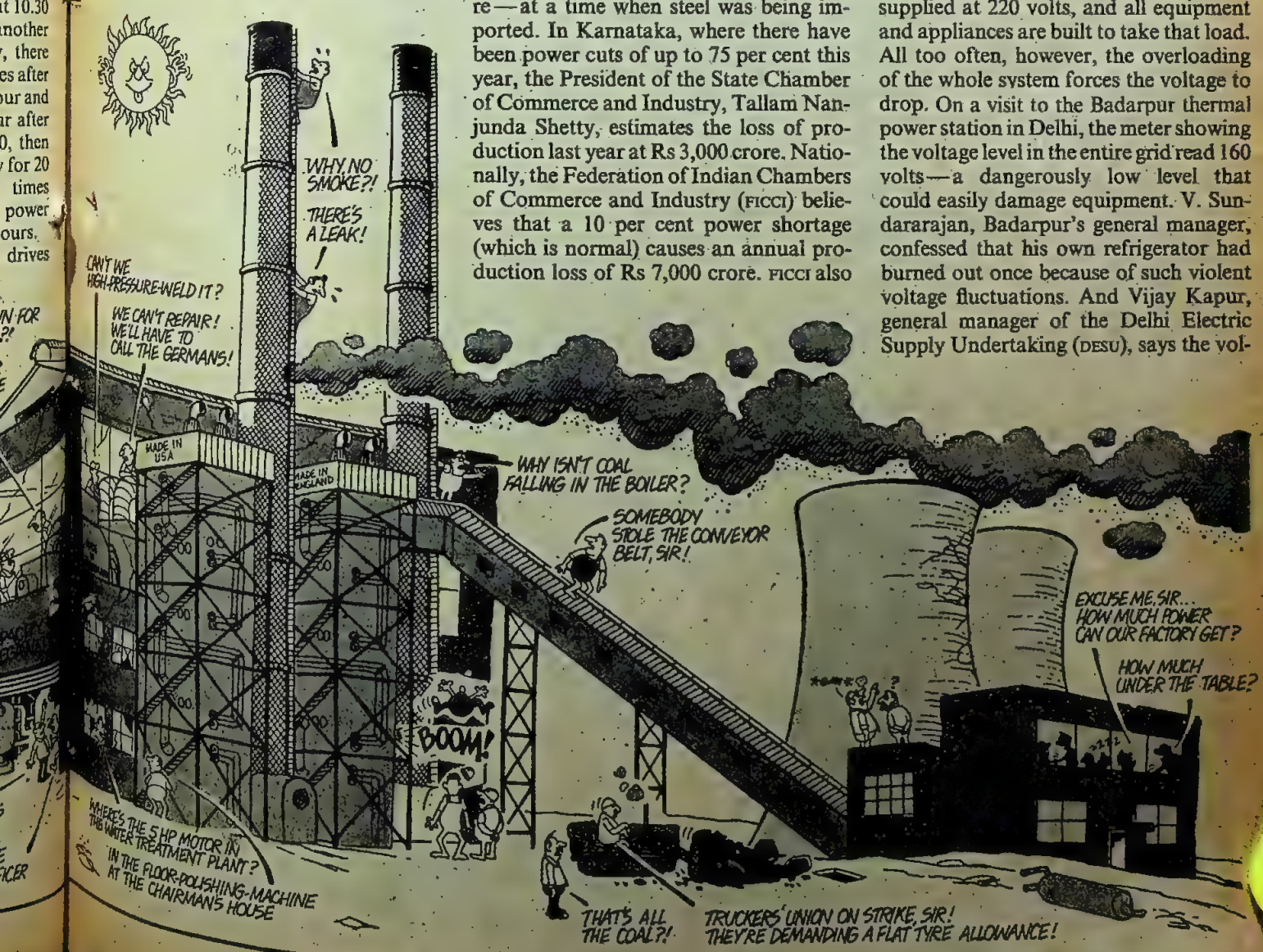
Across the country, farmers trudge out into their fields after dark and stay there till the morning, irrigating their fields with pump-sets that are supplied electricity only at night. In the village of Khatauli, 100 km east of Delhi in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district, they have found a way out of this predicament: diesel generating sets are taken into the fields on bullock-carts in order to pump water. But elsewhere in the country, as in Rajasthan, they must be grateful for such small mercies as the announcement last month that power supply to the state's rural areas was being increased from four hours a day to five.

THE POWER shortage is everywhere, an apparently unconquerable problem that disrupts everyday routine in millions of homes. Whether in Bhagalpur, Daltonganj, Rampur, Sambhal, Sasaram, or hundreds of other small towns in the land, there is a power cut virtually every single day of the year.

It is now the country's No.1 economic problem, holding back industrial growth, forcing machines to lie idle, jobs to be lost, companies to fall "sick". In one three-month period last year, power cuts cost the Steel Authority of India Ltd a production loss estimated at Rs 180 crore—at a time when steel was being imported. In Karnataka, where there have been power cuts of up to 75 per cent this year, the President of the State Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tallam Nanjunda Shetty, estimates the loss of production last year at Rs 3,000 crore. Nationally, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) believes that a 10 per cent power shortage (which is normal) causes an annual production loss of Rs 7,000 crore. FICCI also quotes a World Bank study which says that the power shortage has reduced the annual economic growth rate by between 1 and 3 per cent in each of the last three years. In other words, the actually achieved economic growth rate of 3.5 per cent could well have been 50 to 100 per cent more if it had not been for the shortage of electricity.

If the problem were merely one of a shortage, it is probably that people could somehow adjust. But frequently, the crisis is compounded by the sheer unreliability of the system. There are either frequent trippings, as in the case of Becco Steel Castings, or no knowing in the morning whether power will be made available at all that day. Says Vinay Agarwal, president of the Bhopal Industries Association: "It is impossible to plan any schedule of work. You simply don't know when the next power cut will be, and how long it will last. It could be 10 minutes, or five hours."

Also electricity is supposed to be supplied at 220 volts, and all equipment and appliances are built to take that load. All too often, however, the overloading of the whole system forces the voltage to drop. On a visit to the Badarpur thermal power station in Delhi, the meter showing the voltage level in the entire grid read 160 volts—a dangerously low level that could easily damage equipment. V. Sundararajan, Badarpur's general manager, confessed that his own refrigerator had burned out once because of such violent voltage fluctuations. And Vijay Kapur, general manager of the Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU), says the vol-



tage level in summer is often 180 or 190.

Refrigerator motors burn out, companies plunge into the red, and heart patients slog up multiple flights of stairs, all because there is no power. Yet, there is in most places only a frustrated resignation, no anger. When the Haryana State Electricity Board told thousands of manufacturing units in the industrial town of Faridabad, outside Delhi, that power supply in May would be confined to the night hours, three days a week, even many women employees meekly found ways of reporting for work after dinner.

BUT THIS meek acceptance may not last. Last month, the Singhbhum Chamber of Commerce, the Udityapur Small Industries Association and the Singhbhum Industries Association formed a joint action committee to protest against the power crisis, and to stop paying electricity bills to the Bihar State Electricity Board if the situation did not improve. B.P. Gupta, president of the Bihar Chamber of Commerce, said a decision would be announced soon to stop payments throughout the state.

Bihar's anger is understandable. This year, even the Government's figures show that the power shortage in the state will average 40 per cent, peaking in one month to 47 per cent. Over the country as a whole, the shortage is estimated at just 6 per cent. Manageable, you might think, until you realise that surpluses in some sectors mask large shortages in others. A look at the statistical break-up shows that at various points in the year, Rajasthan will face a 45 per cent shortage, Orissa 35 per cent, and Karnataka 40 per cent. Over the full year, Jammu & Kashmir will suffer a 33 per cent power shortage, Uttar Pradesh 20 per cent, Karnataka 27 per cent, and Orissa 25 per cent. If there are breakdowns, or a shortfall against the targeted generation—as is usually the case—the power shortages will be much greater.

This grim picture is likely to get grimmer. In Haryana, says the state's electricity board, the present shortage of 817 mw will double by the end of the decade to 1,631 mw. In Delhi, a pampered capital where there is virtually no shortage now, there could be a shortage of 600 mw in another six years. In Madhya Pradesh, the gap between demand and supply is expected to double from 350 mw to 700 mw. And Punjab's Power Commissioner, Tejendra Khanna, says: "Even if we complete five projects on time, and get our full share of power from the central projects at Baira-siul (in Himachal Pradesh), Salal and Singrauli (Uttar Pradesh), the shortage in 1990 will be 19 per cent." If all the power that these projects hold promise of does not materialise, the shortage could be 30 per cent and more.

Yet, there is no reason why this should be the case, for power capacity has increased almost beyond belief in the last three decades. In 1950, the country had an installed capacity of only 2,300 mw, against over 40,000 mw now. Only 3,000 villages had electricity then, against 3.4 lakh now. There were only 1.5 million power connections then, against some 30 million now. Electric power has grown faster than all other forms of energy, and much faster than either industry or agriculture. Generating capacity grew by 12 per cent in the 1950s, 11 per cent in the 1960s, and 7 per cent in the 1970s—against an average annual economic growth in the last decade of no more than 3.5 per cent. And power is now the single biggest item of plan investment—20 per cent of the total. Yet, the power shortages have grown and now become endemic.

One reason for this is that the state electricity boards have sanctioned loads far in excess of their capacity to supply power. Some, like Haryana, raced to the target of becoming the first state in the country to electrify all their villages. Others promised power that they did not have to industrialists in an effort to attract their investments. And, over the years, demand steadily outpaced supply. In 1950, the sanctioned load was barely 20 per cent more than the generating capacity—a manageable situation since the full load is not always simultaneously used. But now, the sanctioned load is 100 per cent more than installed capacity, with capacity utilisation itself being no more than 50 per cent.

Having created the problem, the boards have compounded it with the arbitrary methods of a monopoly supplier. In most states, the boards slap on a minimum charge, irrespective of whether power is supplied or not. And the Central India Board Products in Madhya Pradesh was presented late last year with fuel adjustment charges of Rs 1.85 lakh for the year 1980-81—at a time when the company had already finalised its accounts for that year, and for 1980-81, as well as for 1981-82 and 1982-83.

To take another case, Goodyear India wanted a second power feeder line to its tyre factory at Ballabhgarh in Haryana, but the state electricity board was not prepared to pay for it. Anxious to have a



BHAWANI SINGH

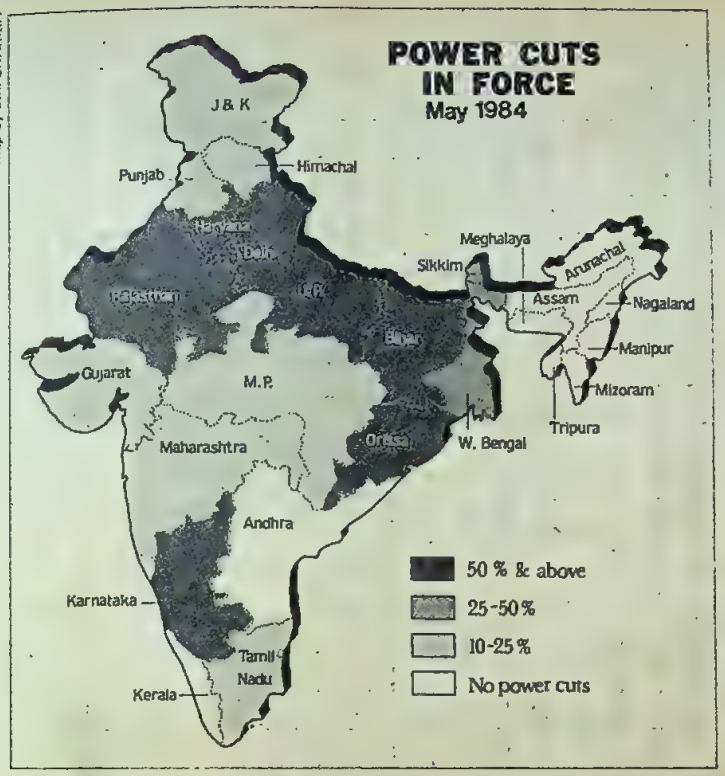
Children studying by candlelight in Calcutta

stand-by line in case the only existing line ever failed, the company paid more than Rs 1 lakh to get the second line installed. But soon enough the electricity board transferred the line to another industrial connection. And Goodyear found that it could do nothing about it. Under the law, the line belonged to the board even though the company had paid for it.

Any attempt to understand the reasons for a problem of such enormous magnitude must lead to a study of the organisations primarily responsible for providing the power: the state electricity boards. And here the discovery is quickly made that if anyone is in a more helpless state than the consumer of electricity, it is the producer of electricity.

The boards could keep a brigade of management consultants busy for the next decade, analysing the myriad problems and searching for solutions. Most of them are financially bankrupt, project management is so weak that projects are unconscionably delayed, capacity utilisation in the completed projects is horrendously low, there are technical problems with their equipment, the coal they get to fire their boilers is probably the worst in the world, there are too many employees and too few who actually work, and they are under such pressure to keep their machines running that even normal maintenance work has to be skipped—causing still more downstream problems. Through all this, there is constant political interference, preventing any professionalised systems of functioning from coming into force.

With a few honourable exceptions like Gujarat, all the boards are neck-deep in debt: well over Rs 1,000 crore have been totted up in losses—at last count. Most of them do not have the money for normal operational expenses, and have to borrow from the Government of their state. P.K. Dasgupta, member (finance) of the West Bengal State Electricity Board, says: "Revenue can be raised if generation is raised. But where are the funds for added generation?" In Delhi, the railways confiscated Rs 55 lakh worth of cement that they were hauling to the Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking, because the DESU hadn't paid them demurrage charges.



At various points in the year Rajasthan will face a 45 per cent shortage, Orissa 35 per cent, and Karnataka 40 per cent. Over the full year, Jammu & Kashmir will suffer a 33 per cent power shortage, Uttar Pradesh 20 per cent, Karnataka 27 per cent, and Orissa 25 per cent.

IF MONEY is a weak point, project management is another. One estimate says that of the last 50 projects completed by the state electricity boards, only two were commissioned on time. The Kolaghat project in West Bengal, for instance, got under way in 1974. The first unit is being finally commissioned next month—six years late.

A variety of river water disputes have meanwhile held up innumerable hydel projects, so that barely 10 per cent of the total hydel potential has been tapped so far. Even when work is completed, as in the case of a thermal plant at Ropar, water disputes can make their presence felt: a failure to settle inter-state differences over the supply of Bhakra canal water to cool the station caused a five-month delay in commissioning.

Further problems arise once the projects are completed. Under ideal conditions, a thermal power station should be able to generate at a steady 63 per cent of its capacity, after making sufficient allowances for maintenance requirements. In 1980, the Committee on Power laid down a more lenient standard: 58 per cent capacity utilisation. As against this, the national average has been less than 50 per cent in all years of the last decade, barring two. Not a single board hit the 58 per cent figure last year. Indeed, in the entire eastern region, including West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and Assam, capacity utilisation last year was 35 per cent or less. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana also fell in the same category, and individual power stations such as the one at Santaldih in West Bengal dipped as low as 27 per cent.

Santaldih is a classic case of the chaos that prevails in the country's power stations. On any given day, only two of the station's four 120 mw units are likely to be running. Worker indiscipline is rampant: on three separate occasions the authorities have tried to install punching systems to ensure that people clock in on time. On each occasion, angry workers have damaged the equipment; or, having punched in, have not shown up at their work stations and the engineers in charge have been too terrified to complain.

Overtime bills are sometimes paid for up to 23 hours of workday. Drivers who get Rs 1,100 in their normal pay packet make three times that amount as overtime payment. Employees in the plant insist on working through the lunch break (on overtime), then take time off to eat, and are back at work after 5 p.m.—to claim more overtime. Yet, precious little gets done. For seven years, sludge collected in the fuel oil storage tanks because no one bothered to clean them. The oil level in the tanks was therefore recorded as being far more than was actually the case. And one day, without warning, the oil ran out. The 480 mw power station had to shut down completely for three



The people who need to be trained are not staff so much as the MLA's and MP's who insist that all manner of unqualified people be employed in the power station.

—N. TATA RAO, Chairman, Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board

days, forcing a major crisis in an already problem-ridden state.

The problem at Santaldih and other power stations in West Bengal traces back, in some measure, to the wholesale enrolment of the politically faithful by the last Congress(I) government in the state, employees who are now beyond all control. A similar intransigence was on display in Delhi last year, when engineers refused to set right a system that had gone on the blink, holding out for 12 hours during which the capital went without power, because their demands had not been met. In Bihar, the labour problem takes on yet another hue: the board has its hands virtually tied by court action from employees who aim to prevent the direct recruitment of engineers, demanding instead that they be given promotions even if they do not have the minimum required qualifications.

N. Tata Rao, the trenchantly outspoken chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board, summed it up at a conference on training power station staff two months ago. He said: "The people who need to be trained are not the staff so much as the MLA's and MP's who insist that all manner of unqualified people be employed in the power stations." But most board chairmen have given in to pressures from politicians. The result: for every megawatt of installed capacity, the boards on average employ seven people. The international norm is less than two. Not surprisingly, the wage bill alone in some boards eats up 40 per cent of the revenue.

If some of that money should logically be billed to the politicians, they should also be asked to pay for the huge losses suffered by the boards on supplying power to farmers. A World Bank study by P.D. Henderson shows that 10 years ago, farmers in almost all the states paid a higher electricity tariff than industry. The national average for agricultural power was 15 paise, against 10 paise for industry. Today, the farmer pays virtually the same rate as he did then, sometimes less: 12 paise in Tamil Nadu. In contrast, industry is charged up to 70 paise per unit. The losses suffered on this alone come to as much as Rs 100 crore in some states. Maharashtra and a few others compensate the boards through a budgetary subsidy, but in general the boards pay for the Government's reluctance to charge a reasonable tariff.

THE BOARDS are often helpless in the face of other problems like poor equipment, and worse coal. One member of the Maharashtra State Electricity Board said bitterly that "our complaints about the equipment given to us by Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) will fill 800 pages". And virtually every power station manager points to the terrible quality of coal that is supplied to them by Coal India Ltd (CIL). At a recent face-off between the boards and CIL, the chairman of the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board threatened to display a three-tonne lump of coal that had been supplied to him.

At the same meeting, CIL Chairman M.S. Gujral and Tata Rao—both equally outspoken men—got into a straight slanging-match on the quality of coal. Gujral finally ended the debate declaring: "Muck is what I have, and muck is what you will get." He had a point: Indian coal is high ash coal, and there is precious little he can do about it. But Tata Rao, speaking before this particular incident, blamed the problems of stations on two factors: BHEL's virtual monopoly on equipment supply, and CIL's monopoly on coal. Says Tata Rao: "Before coal-mining was nationalised, the coal control order defined coal as having an ash limit of 35 per cent. If the ash content was higher, it was not considered coal. But today we have to accept even 50 per cent ash content. I defy anyone in the world to get power from such coal."

The BHEL problem began with the

NTPC

Success Story

THE GIANT chimneys, almost three times as tall as Delhi's Qutab Minar, dominate the Singrauli skyline in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Thin wisps of smoke emerge from the mouths of the stacks, suggesting that the huge power station is not generating much electricity. But the truth is quite different, as revealed by the control panels inside the 600-metre-long generator hall: one 200 mw unit is generating at 102 per cent of its capacity, another at 98 per cent, a third at 87.5 per cent and a fourth at 85 per cent. The fifth is down for repairs. Between them, the four functioning units are generating power at an average 93 per cent of their combined capacity. The national average is 48 per cent.

Both the virtually smokeless chimneys as well as the readings on the instrument panels tell of a remarkable success story in an otherwise dismal area of enterprise. The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), the Central public sector undertaking which runs the Singrauli super-thermal power station as well as two others at Korba in Madhya Pradesh and Ramagundam in Andhra Pradesh, has not only controlled smoke emissions to the extent of 99 per cent (a triumph of pollution control), but won the national award for the best performance in power generation. As if this were not enough, it has commissioned eight of its 10 functioning 200 mw units bang on schedule. The other two were commissioned ahead of schedule!

Compared to the miserable performance of most of the state electricity boards, NTPC's record stands out brightly in an area of general gloom. Most of the boards lose money every year; NTPC has been making profits. The boards have an average thermal plant capacity utilisation of a little over 40 per cent, some of them barely 35 per cent. In contrast, NTPC has averaged over 60 per cent, not counting the units that are new and still to stabilise. The boards have almost never commissioned a project on time; NTPC has never failed to do so. The boards employ seven men for every megawatt of installed power capacity; at some places, the figure is as high as

11. The NTPC, in contrast, has less than two men per megawatt, and aims to bring that down to less than 1.5. Some of the difference is explained by the retailing of power, an employment-intensive task that NTPC leaves to the boards, but this is only a partial explanation. The truth is that NTPC is a leaner, fitter, more purposive organisation than any other in the power sector.

What sets it apart from the others?

In some ways, it has simply been lucky. It had the advantage of starting with a clean slate in 1976, whereas the electricity boards have invariably had to wrestle with the wilting psychology that results from accumulated failures. The NTPC has had no money problems, being liberally financed by both the Central Government and the World Bank, whereas the boards are perennially strapped for cash. NTPC has had access to the best of global technology and consultants, whereas most of the boards have installed equipment supplied by Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) before its technology, acquired in the 1960s from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, was debugged. Finally, NTPC has been virtually insulated from political interference, unlike the boards where it is often the local minister or assembly member who says how many people should be recruited, and from where.

But the organisation has also benefited from having two strong men at the top, both of whom know their mind and are intent on getting things done. The first was D.V. Kapur, who set the show going, and the second is the current Chairman and Managing Director, A.K. Sah. Asked what sets NTPC apart from the others, Sah offers a complex set of explanations that sound rather prosaic: the setting up of sound systems of functioning, access to international



Sah: prosaic explanations

power station expertise, a strong emphasis on quality, effective performance budgeting and other similar attributes that every organisation should have but few actually do.

Many of these boil down to a question of simply working harder to get the results. When an electricity board places equipment orders with BHEL, the order usually runs over no more than a page. NTPC, in contrast, hands over 23 volumes of documentation on how exactly it wants things done. On another front, the effort to reduce down-time, a mind-stretching 7,000 different types of equipment failures have been identified and procedures outlined to speedily handle them. Another 6,000 will soon be added to this list. Then, to ensure quality, NTPC's inspection teams monitor the work done by BHEL, interfering in a manner that often meets with resistance but eventually delivers results. One of the units at Korba reached full capacity in 14 days of synchronisation, a process that usually takes months; the achievement testifies to the rigid quality control during project stage.

Finally, there is the confidence that spreads through an organisation because of the very consciousness of having delivered in the past. At the Rihand and Vindhyachal thermal power project sites, both near Singrauli, engineers are fired with an obvious commitment to getting things done. All this is not to say that NTPC is perfect. It has, for instance, run up fairly steep project cost escalations in some cases. And work on some of its transmission lines is delayed. But the overall record is outstanding.

Not surprisingly, the Government has begun to rely heavily on NTPC to deliver electricity to a power-starved country. And in a few years, if things go to plan, NTPC will be the single largest power generating organisation in the country. By the year 2000, it is expected to have under its control more than 35 per cent of the total national thermal power generating capacity.

Already, it has commissioned 10 units with a total capacity of 2,000 mw, while the 720 mw Badarpur power station in Delhi was given to NTPC to manage in 1978. Work is under way on projects that will yield an additional 7,060 mw, and by the turn of the century its installed capacity is expected to climb to 27,920 mw — equal to the total thermal capacity in the entire country today. The investment involved will be over Rs 30,000 crore — equal to the total investment in over 200 Central public sector undertakings so far.

The plan is obvious: if the electricity boards can't deliver the goods, NTPC will step in. In the process, if the Centre starts virtually taking over the power sector then so be it.

— T.N. NINAN



The NTPC power station at Singrauli

acquisition of Soviet and Czech technology in the 1960s, because of the attraction of payment in rupees. BHEL immediately ran into a host of technical snags, and a study in 1980 by the Committee on Power showed imported sets functioning at 50 per cent better capacity than BHEL's. Since then, the company has made a determined effort to deal more efficiently with customer complaints, to iron out basic technical defects, and finally to acquire more modern German technology. But even in recent months there have been close to a dozen cases of hydrogen leaking from the cooling system of the generator. Of the five BHEL sets installed at the National Thermal Power Corporation's giant station at Singrauli in Uttar Pradesh three have run into this headache, apart from others in Maharashtra, Gujarat and elsewhere. Singrauli General Manager M.L. Malik estimates that, in the last one year alone, he lost 2,000 million units of power on this account: a staggering loss of Rs 80 crore in revenue.

Nevertheless, B.S. Samat, BHEL's director (power), is right when he says that the performance of his company's equipment has improved vastly. Samat points out that "out of 43,200 mw sets of ours that are running, 19 worked at more than 58 per cent of capacity last year, and 12 sets did more than 70 per cent".

BUT THE electricity boards cannot get away by blaming all their problems on the suppliers of equipment and raw material. In most of the boards, there is no professionalism, corruption is rampant, overmanning is a disease, and political interference a daily fact of life. Basic tasks like staff training are habitually ignored: a plant at Kota was due for commissioning some time ago, with no trained staff to run it. And in a system that is constantly stretched to the limit because of the pressure to feed a hungry system, even normal maintenance gets the go-by. Boilers in thermal plants are supposed to be overhauled every year, but most run for three years before they are taken down. Turbine-generator sets are supposed to be overhauled once in three years, so that one-third of all the sets in the country should be taken down every year. But in some years the number of sets overhauled has been no more than one in 14.

The failure to do timely overhauls has meant that unscheduled outages have doubled in frequency over the years. Everyone realises that delaying maintenance work is very short-term wisdom, but in a situation of constant power cuts no one wants to deliberately shut down a set until it is unavoidable. A senior Central Government official confessed last fortnight: "Right now, one of the units at Badarpur needs maintenance work quite urgently. But we have asked them to keep running the set, even at partial capacity, because otherwise there will be a shortage in Delhi."

The usual inefficiency of the boards then compounds the problem. Normally, boiler overhaul should take only 28 days; in one recent year, the average time taken turned out to be 68 days. And turbine-generator sets that should be worked over in 45 days, take 126 days to overhaul.

If delayed overhauls are one fall-out of the shortage syndrome, inter-state squabbles are another. Uttar Pradesh is supposed to pass on some of the power generated at Singrauli to Delhi, Punjab and Haryana, but will not do so. Andhra Pradesh is supposed to give some of the power generated at Ramagundam, another central station, to Karnataka, but keeps all the electricity to itself. On the one day that power was passed on, Kar-

Breaking coal at Delhi's Indraprastha

BHAWAN SINGH



nataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde made the mistake of announcing it to the press. The next day, there was uproar in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, the Government was hauled over the coals, and power stopped flowing to Karnataka. In yet a third instance, Tamil Nadu refuses to share with any other state the power generated at the new Kalpakkam atomic station. And Orissa once refused to link its power transmission grid with that of neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, for fear of that state gaining access to Orissa's cheap hydel power. Today, the boot is on the other foot: Orissa desperately needs power, Madhya Pradesh is occasionally in a position to supply it, but there is no grid link to make this possible. Finally, Delhi must always get all the power it needs; so it draws at random from all the surrounding states in order to ensure that the capital city's residents do not suffer. Says an official in the capital: "The whole system is chaotic. We could mitigate some of the worst shortages if the power is shared equally, but none of the states will cooperate."

One way out would be for the Centre to control all the transmission lines and substations. But this is impossible when electricity comes under the Constitution's concurrent list, making it the responsibility of both the Centre and the states. In any case, as yet another fall-out of the shortage syndrome, most investment in the power sector has gone into creating fresh generating capacity, so that investment in transmission systems has suffered heavily. In the first four years of the current five-year plan, only 40 per cent of the targeted 5,893 km of 400 kv transmission lines have been laid, and barely half of the targeted 21,175 km of 220 kv lines. This, is the case even though the targets themselves were slashed by 25 per cent because of a shortage of funds.

IF THE shortage syndrome has prompted many states to take power into their own hands, consumers are following suit. It is now normal practice almost everywhere for industrialists to bribe power distribution staff in order to ensure that they escape from the rigours of power cuts; and much of the stolen power is passed off as transmission losses (abnormally high at over 20 per cent, instead of being less than 15 per cent). At a meeting organised by FICCI a few months ago, a ripple of laughter spread through the hall when K.C. Pant, chairman of the Energy Advisory Board, referred pointedly to the high transmission losses. And DESU General Manager Vijay Kapur says that in a recent check on 650 consumers in one part of the capital, no fewer than 250 were found to be misusing their power connections. In Bihar, 2,349 raids over the last two years caught 1,876 offenders, and the official in charge says senior electricity board staff were often revealed to be accomplices.

Farmers have caught on equally fast: since they are charged a flat tariff depending on the horsepower (HP) of their pump-sets, it is now common practice to install 10 HP sets with a lower 5 HP rating shown on the manufacturer's name-plate. The inevitable result of these increasingly common malpractices is that the load on the system is far greater than expected, voltage drops, or load-shedding has to be resorted to. And as usual the customer complaints mount.

Will the complaints ever cease?

In a determined effort to get rid of the power shortage once and for all, the Government now plans a hefty 80 per cent increase in generation over the Seventh Five Year-Plan, the objective being to raise power availability from 154 billion units this year to 280 billion units by 1989-90. Fresh capacity to be added is

DELHI

Capital Gain

AT 6.25 p.m. on Sunday evenings in Delhi, just before the Hindi film is due to start, countless TV sets get switched on almost simultaneously. And the capital's power consumption shoots up steeply by 40 mw. On Monday mornings, at 9.45, just before offices open for the day, the load shoots up by 100 mw as air-conditioners get switched on in office complexes. On both occasions, the observant ones will notice a sudden dip in voltage, but the system quickly stabilises.

The Sunday film can be watched in comfort, and office-goers can work in air-conditioned offices. All of which would be fine except that in the satellite towns around the capital, like Ghaziabad in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, factories are going without power. Delhi in contrast has no power shortage worth speaking of. That is partly because the Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU) does not give Haryana the 62.5 mw share it is entitled to from the 282 mw Indraprastha power station in the capital. A DESU official blames this on Haryana, arguing that the state does not pay for the maintenance of the generating sets But Haryana argues that it sees no point in paying for electricity that it will not get anyway.

BHAWAN SINGH



DESU's Vijay Kapur: privileged area

Delhi also gets all the power generated by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) from the 720 mw Badarpur power station in the capital. The power is supplied to DESU by NTPC at 48 paise per unit. But DESU in turn charges Delhi's citizens no more than 27 paise at the lowest consumption slab. The subsidy is really far more than the gap between the buying and selling price, for DESU has not paid Badarpur for years now. The accumulated bill: Rs 200 crore. Meanwhile, Delhi remains the only place in the country where the power tariff has not been revised since April 1979.

Delhi also claims some power from the Baira-siul hydel project in Himachal Pradesh. This was constructed primarily for Punjab and Haryana, but Delhi grabs a good chunk.

Nevertheless, the capital still falls short of power occasionally: by 18 per cent in the first half of June, for instance. But that's no problem either: the solution is to borrow still more from the surrounding states, the justification being that when the capital has surplus power it passes it on to them.

But all good things must come to an end. And with no new generating capacity sanctioned for a city where demand grows annually by 100 mw, a critical shortage is round the corner. Projections show a 600 mw shortage developing by 1990, unless some short-term projects are quickly cleared. There is, of course, the other option of drawing still more power from the surrounding states.

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pegged at over 27,000 mw, and investment over the five years at a staggering Rs 67,000 crore—partly to make up for the weaknesses of the transmission system, and partly to make a start on new projects that will fructify in subsequent plans.

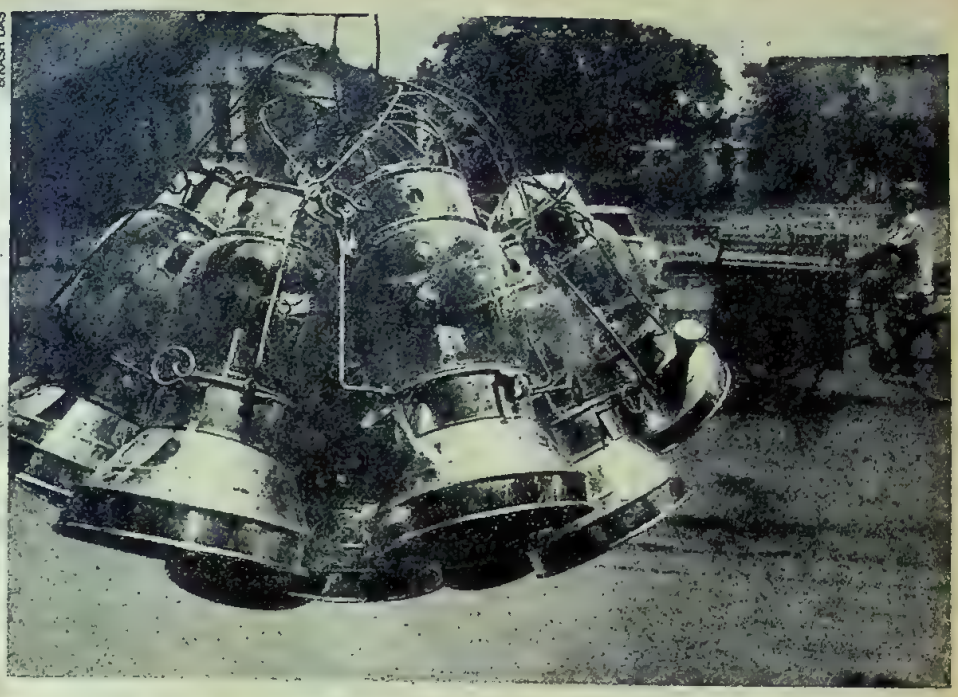
But it remains to be seen whether the money can be found, and whether this massive expansion of the power system will eventually take place. Ambitions had soared even higher in an earlier plan, when a 90 per cent increase in capacity was aimed at, only to finally end up with barely half that target achieved.

Will things work better this time around? Among the consumers at least, there is now little hope of seeing any improvement. In Calcutta, where the power crisis is now in its twelfth year, virtually everyone who can afford to has invested in inverter systems that form little power packs of their own, sufficient to light a bulb and turn a fan. The sale of portable generators has also become a flourishing business: some 65,000 of Japanese make are estimated to have come in during the last three or four years, and Yamaha now plans to start the manufacture of these generators in India, in collaboration with a local partner.

Like the household purchasers of generator sets, most industrialists too are planning to go it on their own, refusing to believe that things will ever get better. Companies across the country are installing captive generation equipment even if this means a huge outlay and a running cost that is double that of what they have to pay the boards for every unit of power they consume. Fizz Drinks, a soft drink bottling company outside Delhi, is installing its own generator even though this adds to its total investment by a hefty 40 per cent. "I have no choice," says company proprietor Vinay Rai, "because summer is the season of peak demand, and also the time when the power shortage is at its worst."

Goodyear India has run its plant at Ballabhgarh, for some years with 40 per cent captive generation capacity. But last year, there was no power for 131 days out of 365. And last May there was no power for 340 hours out of the total 744 hours in the month. For all the remaining hours, there were drastic curbs on how much power the company could actually draw. Power would also get cut off mid-way through the processing of rubber, causing enormous wastage of raw materials and a jamming of machines. The company is now installing 100 per cent captive power ability. Says Managing Director Hardev Singh: "It is costing us heavily. But no matter what the cost, it is cheaper than having no power at all."

BIKASH DAS



Lanterns on sale in Calcutta

S. Venkatramanan, power secretary in the Central Government, estimates that the captive power capacity in the country now totals 3,000 mw. That is 7 per cent of the national total. A further 2,500 mw of captive capacity has been cleared by the Government, and more applications are in the pipeline.

PRESSURE has also been building up to allow the private sector a greater role in power generation. FICCI and other representative spokesmen for the private sector have repeatedly pointed out that private power stations —the Tatas' in Trombay, the Birlas' at Renusagar in Uttar Pradesh, or the Ahmedabad Electricity Company—have consistently performed far better than those run by the public sector electricity boards. This is true, but it is not the whole truth: the Vijayawada station in Andhra Pradesh, or the Tuticorin station in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, have a record that compares perfectly well with any of those run by the private sector. Also, the private sector has had the advantage of getting better fuel, imported equipment, and an assured, steady load, all of which make for better operating conditions. Said the chairman of one electricity board: "If they give us the same conditions, we can deliver results just as well."

That seems to be the judgement of the Government as well. For though it has welcomed a greater private sector role in power generation, and recently cleared the Tatas' proposal for a second 500 mw unit at Trombay, none of the other proposals has met with official favour. A consortium led by the Kotharis in Madras has proposed leasing 200 mw sets from abroad, while some other half-formed proposals—totalling 1,250 mw capacity—have also stipulated importing the equipment plus drawing on public sector sources for financing the investment. The Government has insisted, however, that those who want to set up power stations must put in their own money. Other than the Tatas, no one else has managed to do this so far. And a private sector solution to the crisis seems unlikely.

Any healthy electric supply system needs at least 20 per cent reserve power. In India, far from a 20 per cent surplus, there is probably a 20 per cent shortage. This has first to be made up, then fresh capacity created to meet the 10 to 15 per cent annual growth in demand, and after that the reserve capacity created. With thermal projects taking a minimum of four years, and hydel projects a minimum of eight, any action that starts today to reach this goal will take a long time to give results.

But with the private sector's role strictly circumscribed, the electricity boards unable to set their house in order, overall capacity utilisation in the system unlikely to rise, and a question mark hanging over how much money the Government can spare for power, the future looks bleak. And the Indian economy is likely to remain short-circuited.

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports

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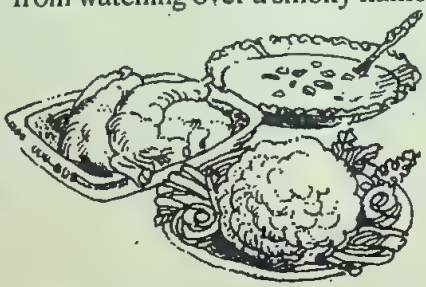
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THE RAILWAYS

A Head-on Collision

THE INDIAN Railways have seldom witnessed such a head-on administrative collision. The simmering feud between A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the weighty railway minister, and C.K. Jaffer Sharief, the minister of state, had all along been public knowledge in the capital's red sandstone Rail Bhavan, the headquarters of the Railway Ministry. It blew up into the open last fortnight when sources allegedly close to Sharief chose Khan Chowdhury's trip to Madras as the cue for releasing to the press a ringing accusation against him of diverting development funds of the railways to his native West Bengal, and his home constituency of Malda, at the expense of the southern states. The accusation was in the form of a letter written by Sharief to the prime minister, copies of which were also sent to the Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Khan Chowdhury's rival in Bengal politics—and the Union Planning Minister, S.B. Chavan.

Sharief's poisoned dart reached home all right because a troubled Khan Chowdhury, who had only a week ago peremptorily cancelled a conference of the nine general managers of the railways convened by his junior, rushed back to New Delhi without addressing a scheduled press conference at the latter's home town, Bangalore. The source of his anxiety the prime minister was even-handed in her dealings with the warring ministers: both were ordered into instant cease-fire. But many southern newspapers were still black with headlines about Sharief's charges which struck, in a calculated manner, emotional chords in an election year. Before going off the air at the prime minister's behest, Sharief told INDIA TODAY: "The railways are a national property and should be treated as such. They are supposed to cater to the entire nation not just to West Bengal, or Malda."

Sharief, in his letter, had detailed the projects in West Bengal, "the disproportionately high budgetary allocation for a one city, Calcutta", and said that "it puts as in an awkward position in Parliament and in public". He demanded an additional Rs 35 crore for the four southern states, and sullenly added that if the Finance Ministry refused it "the only other alternative is to make a reallocation" and divert the amount from projects in West Bengal. The main thrust of Sharief's charge, however, was that Khan Chowdhury had been pampering his home town, Malda, crucially located along the route that connects the port city of Calcutta with the land-locked north-east, at the expense of the railways.



Ghani Khan Chowdhury

The main thrust of Sharief's charge was that Khan Chowdhury had been pampering his home town Malda... at the expense of the railway.



C.K. Jaffer Sharief

Malda is indeed the scene of some frenetic railway activity ever since Khan Chowdhury assumed charge of the ministry on September 2, 1982. With a little over Rs 10 crore in various projects riding over Malda, and at least a dozen marble plaques bearing Khan Chowdhury's name springing up all over the bustling town, the minister seems firmly poised on the road to immortality in his home town.

The real boom of Malda began with the decision this year to delink it from the North-east Frontier Railway (NFR), give it to the Howrah-based Eastern Railway, and set it up as a divisional headquarters. The decision for upgrading Malda as a division was sudden. Even in March 1983, while winding up the general debate on the railway budget, Khan Chowdhury had stated on the issue of proposals for setting up new divisions: "We are helpless in this matter. We have to wait for the report of the Railway Reforms Committee." But later on he announced a summary decision regarding Malda, saying that "it has been included in the 1984-85 budget". Riding roughshod over the objections of the Finance Ministry, the obliging Chairman of the Railway Board, K.T.V. Raghavan, wrote: "We do not have to wait for the report of the Railway Reforms Committee in this regard since it is justified by the factors of work-load and safety."

This is indeed a Catch-22 situation. If Malda is shown as a part of Eastern Railway, the work-load factor of Howrah, which is 260 on the specialised scale of indices where 100 is the permissible limit for further split-up, certainly justifies the creation of Malda as a new divisional headquarters. The same decision would have been unjustifiable if Malda had remained a part of NFR.

There was already a spate of beautification schemes, including a swimming pool, coming up at Malda after Khan Chowdhury became the railway minister. However, the upgradation of Malda threw open the floodgate for such grandiose schemes as:

- a diesel locomotive shed;
- remodelling of the railway station;
- an air-conditioned officers rest-house;
- a 100-bed railway hospital;
- training schools for the Railway Protection Force personnel and nurses of the railway hospitals; and
- an expensive indoor stadium, a park-cum-restaurant complex.

Many of these schemes have been subjected to steep cost-escalation. The indoor stadium, for instance, was earlier conceived on a modest scale, with a cheque of Rs 5 lakh donated by Buta Singh, minister for sports, and another Rs 5 lakh coming from the Railway Sports Control Board. However, Eastern Railway has now proposed taking it up as a full-fledged railway project at an estimated cost of Rs 25 lakh. Similarly,

against a sanctioned Rs 4.5 lakh, an amount of Rs 75 lakh has already been spent on the park and restaurant even though the park is seldom visited by the people of Malda because the authorities have imposed a 20-paise entry fee.

Similarly, the hospital, which was originally thought of as a 30-bed unit, was sanctioned a 100-bed in an ad hoc manner, without waiting for budgetary clearance. The diesel locomotive shed was earlier included in the plans for NFR. But Raghavan, when he was general manager of the NFR prior to his appointment as the chairman of the Railway Board, had cleared the proposal for its transfer to Malda under Eastern Railway.

Khan Chowdhury justified the lavish spending on the various ongoing schemes in Malda. He said: "There are certain statutory amenities that go with a divisional headquarters; the 100-bed hospital and the stadium are some of them." However, even though Sambalpur in Orissa and Ahmedabad in Gujarat have recently been upgraded to the status of divisional headquarters, they are yet to be provided with such statutory amenities.

Khan Chowdhury's critics in Malda point out that in many cases contracts for the development works have been awarded in a hasty and irregular manner. Railway engineers allege that contracts awarded for the park complex and the diesel shed project with the adjoining Pheroze Shah Colony were awarded not to the lowest bidders but those who quoted at 60 to 100 per cent higher. The Railway Ministry, however, defends its decision, saying that in some cases the consideration of speed and efficiency had to prevail over the cost factor, and that in no case were the established tendering procedures ignored.

However, an employee of the diesel shed claims that contractors were forced to work at double the normal speed—17 months as against three years normally—and were naturally constrained to sacrifice quality. The walls seem unsteady and the foundation of a compressor machine cracked soon after the machine was installed.

Local railway sources also allege that there has been a noticeable drop in the efficiency of handling of freight through Malda as a result of its transfer to Eastern Railway. L. Haq, secretary of the United Committee of Railwaymen, Malda, explained that a major problem of "interchangeability" of trains from the Malda town station yard to the NFR line till New Jalpaiguri has arisen following the transfer. Earlier NFR controlled the





INDRANIL BANERJIE

The swimming pool (top) and the re-modelled railway station in Malda: grandiose schemes

yard and the entire movement of trains after Farakka. Goods train rakes were reorganised at the Malda yard and sent off to their destinations.

Now Eastern Railway handles the formation of rakes not necessarily as per the NFR's requirements. Besides all the work-load of the NFR handled by the Malda yard has now fallen on the New Jalpaiguri yard which has not been expanded. Haq claims that goods trains movement through Malda has been adversely affected as a result. While the NFR target for wagon detention at Malda was 16 hours each, Haq says it is well over 100 hours now. At present only four to six pairs of goods trains daily traverse the Malda yard against eight pairs previously. All this, he calculates, has culminated in a 30 per cent drop in the movement of goods traffic by NFR.

HAQ CLAIMS the actual reason for transferring Malda to Eastern Railway is that now both the railways are spending on different schemes. In fact, the decision for the transfer of Malda met with stiff opposition from the employees who were entitled to a few extra benefits as a result of being with the NFR. The Calcutta High Court vindicated the employees' stand and ordered the railway authorities to treat 1,865 out of a total of 3,000 former NFR employees as being employees of the latter despite the transfer.

Sharief maintained that Khan Chowdhury's partiality was confined not only to Malda. He cited as an example the Rs 36 crore Ekalakhi-Balurghat broad gauge along the India-Bangladesh border. But Khan Chowdhury came up with an elaborate reply.

According to him, Rs 2,100 crore had been allocated in the last two five year plans under four main "development heads", such as track modification, setting up of factories, workshops and electrification. Out of this, the four southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh accounted for Rs 860 crore, or 30 per cent, while the share of West Bengal was "not more than Rs 35 crore". Quipped a Railway Board official sympathetic to the minister: "The charge of discrimination should be directed the other way round."

Khan Chowdhury also pointed out that despite complaints of the growing bottleneck at Malda because of its transfer to Eastern Railway, the movement of foodgrains to the north-eastern states has "sizeably improved". He said: "My critics tend to ignore the common logic that even if fewer rakes are passing through Malda now, the rakes are being formed much longer than they used to be."

The other charge of the minister's preferential attitude towards Calcutta may not be founded on facts. The main railway expenditure is the Metro project which, when launched in 1971, was esti-

mated to cost less than Rs 150 crore. However, between 1971 and 1980, the railway authorities spent only Rs 60 crore on it; meanwhile the cost escalated to Rs 650 crore. In the two years between 1981-82 and 1982-83, only another Rs 100 crore were spent, but by then the cost had further sky-rocketted to Rs 1,000 crore. This year, an amount of Rs 80 crore has been earmarked for the project.

The attacks on Khan Chowdhury for being partial to West Bengal and Malda are in fact destined to strengthen his popularity in his home state rather than harming him. Though feeling somewhat expansive in his office of the railway minister, Khan Chowdhury is in reality a neighbourhood politician who is fond of throwing his weight around in his home state and home district.

In fact he makes a big occasion out of his visits to Malda, which are a frequent affair. Normally station earnings cannot be withdrawn except in times of natural calamities. But documents available at Malda station show that a total of Rs 52,673.06 was withdrawn at different dates in October and November 1982, to make arrangements for the 'MR(s)' (Minister of Railways) visits.

Khan Chowdhury's spending habits are extravagant and feudal. He has two telephones at Malda, one personal (MDA 2744) and one as MP (MDA 2797). He had not paid his personal phone bills amounting to Rs 46, 426.10 incurred between March 8, 1982 and January 1, 1984 and his MP phone bills of Rs 20,379 during the same period. Both these bills were finally paid on June 2 this year. But the payment was made by the Eastern Railway (cheque No. 432650 dated May 30, 1984) to the Malda (main) branch of the State Bank of India. Railway sources were aghast that Eastern Railway could pay for the minister's personal telephone bills, and that too for a period prior to his appointment as the railway minister.

Khan Chowdhury is still loved by his own people as a man who has the interest of Malda and West Bengal uppermost in his mind. The people of his district have not forgotten that in 1972, after joining the Siddhartha Shankar Ray ministry in West Bengal as its minister for power and irrigation, one of his first tasks was to take about 10,000 youths, mostly locality boys, into the West Bengal State Electricity Board against all technical opinion. Remarks one of his avid supporters in Malda: "If helping the people close to home is a crime for a politician, then we'd gladly elect a criminal again."

—SUMIT MITRA and INDRANIL BANERJIE in Malda

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BEGGARS HOMES

Dungeons of Doom

A FEW months before the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi, part of the concerted drive to spruce up the capital was the rounding up of all beggars from the streets. Little, however, was done about the facilities. Delhi has 12 beggars homes that are little more than dungeons where the poor and impoverished are herded together like cattle. Principal Correspondent PRABHU CHAWLA*'s investigations, however, have revealed more alarming facts; the abnormal number of deaths among the beggars that is directly related to the conditions and facilities at the homes; and the shocking allegations by some inmates that they were not beggars but had been rounded up by overzealous authorities who are intent on filling quotas. His report:*

IN THEIR more illustrious days, they were the stables for the imperial cavalry. Today, the dilapidated buildings in Delhi's Kingsway Camp serve as a Reception-cum-Classification Centre (RCC) for arrested beggars. When the Delhi administration rounds up men and women under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, it is here that they are brought. And it is here, sometimes within just a few months of them being lodged that some of them die under questionable circumstances.

Last year the number of deaths at the RCC was 65. In all, 473 detenus at the 12 detention centres located in Delhi died — of malnutrition, infection and plain neglect. Thousands more continue to spend their final days in pain and hunger in the gloom of the dungeons for the poor.

Administration officials stoutly defend the deaths as being of natural causes. Asserts Mrs Kiran Dhingra, director of the Social Welfare Department: "These deaths are related entirely with the poor health of these beggars. They come to us when they are almost at the doorstep of death." The statistics, however, do not bear this out though 40 per cent of those arrested in 1983-84 were over 50 years of age, only 25 per cent of them died. More than 200 of the 473 dead were between the ages of 25 and 50.

Even if they were ill when they entered the homes, the inmates, some of whom had been incarcerated for between one and three years, should have improved in health on a diet worth Rs 8 which is what the law provides for them. Dr C.D. Sukhija, a prominent physician of east Delhi where two poor homes for diseased detenus are located, says: "If all the beggars actually receive what is provided in the act, then the mortality rate should considerably decline."

But though the act — which on paper is quite humane — provides for a good many basic comforts, conditions in the homes are appalling. In the overcrowded confines, healthy detenus are confined with patients of leprosy, tuberculosis and other diseases, some of them highly infectious. And sane inmates suffer among a gaggle of lunatics.

The number of deaths in each home seems directly related to how badly maintained the buildings are. For exam-

At the Kingsway Camp beggars home



BHAWAN SINGH

ple, the Home for Old and Infirm Beggars at Narela headed the list with 122 deaths last year. Detenus at Narela are kept in a small house without any properly maintained toilets. While plaster peels off the walls, inmates sleep on worm-infested floors with wide cracks.

Madan Lal Khurana, leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Metropolitan Council, says: "Despite my repeated protests, the Delhi administration authorities have not bothered to find out why young people were dying inside the homes after living there for months. They were either not looked after properly or were tortured."

Though Khurana does not cite any evidence of torture, even the medical inquests reveal that gross malnutrition and poor upkeep of the homes contribute to deaths. The efforts of the part-time doctors attached to the homes are obviously inadequate. One of them explains: "We do physical examination on the basis of appearances. We don't have sophisticated equipment to examine a beggar thoroughly. It may be possible that these chronic diseases are found out when a patient is on the verge of collapse."

But there is also the possibilty that many of them did not die of any serious illness but as a direct result of the squalid conditions in which they were expected to live. For one thing, the homes are not supposed to keep patients of such diseases as tuberculosis—one of the alleged causes of deaths. And some of the diseases given in medical reports do not normally occur in age groups they are supposed to have afflicted. Many of the deaths have been caused by sudden "respiratory failure", which is generally caused by tension. Some case studies:

▶ Mohan Singh, a 45-year-old able-bodied person, was arrested on January 14, 1983, allegedly for begging. He was convicted for a year and after spending two weeks at the RCC, he was sent to Lampur on February 2, 1983. Seven months later he died in Kingsway Camp's poor home hospital of "severe anaemia and hypoproteinimia". In layman's language, he was malnourished.

▶ Saleem, the 19-year-old son of a carpenter, was imprisoned for a year for begging on January 24, 1984. Two weeks later he fell ill and complained of chest pain. On February 24, 1984, he died in Alipur Block Hospital of "cardiac respiratory failure", a highly uncommon affliction in that age group.

▶ Raja Singh, 25, was sentenced for two years for begging in New Delhi. After spending a few days at RCC he was sent to Lampur on January 28, 1984, where he died on March 3, 1984. The doctor of the Block Hospital declared that he died because of nephrotic syndrome—failure of the kidney caused by improper diet.

▶ Vijay, 30, was rounded up by the police and was awarded a year's imprisonment. He was lodged in the beggar home at Narela, despite his pleas that he was not a beggar. His relatives were not informed. Four weeks later, he was admitted to the poor home's hospital, which lacks basic medical facilities. In the absence of proper prognosis, and medical care, he died on February 2, 1984, of "chest infection and severe anaemia". There was no post-mortem examination.

▶ Balasubramanium, 30, came to New Delhi to visit one of his relatives in Karol Bagh. He was arrested for begging on December 3, 1983, and sentenced for one year. He was also lodged at Narela's poor home where he died on April 5, 1984, due to "chest infection".

SOME of these wretched detenus have never even begged. Faced with quotas by an administration obssessed (since a little before Asiad '82) with presenting a showpiece capital, the Delhi Police roved the streets for men and women they could charge with begging. Anyone who looked shabby enough or was unemployed was hauled off.

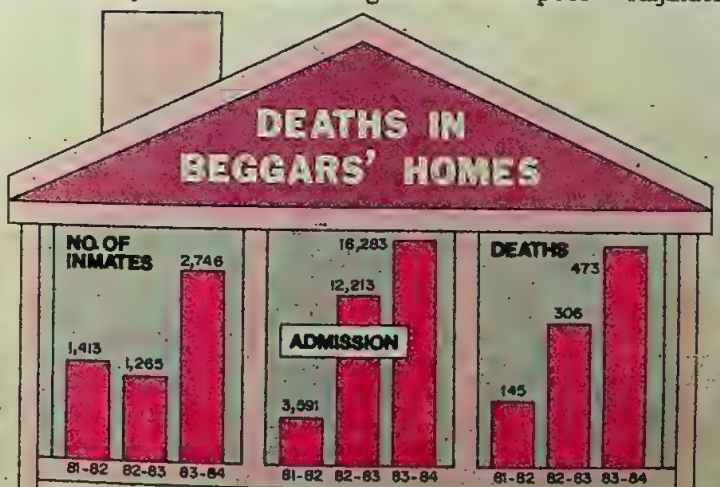
The act provides that before sentencing the beggars the metropolitan magistrate shall give due consideration to the age and character of the beggar, the circumstances and conditions in which he was living, and the reports collected by Delhi administration's probationary officers. But invariably, the beggars have been convicted in summary trials.

A beggar in Kingsway Camp home number 1 alleged: "I was never produced before the magistrate. Yet I was awarded punishment." Under the act, each beggar's relatives are to be informed by the probationary officers. But of the 16,000 detenus, the probationary officers have contacted relatives of only 2,000 so far. Rajinder, 25, from Jabalpur, says: "I have not been able to contact my relations even after six months of my detention. I have an old mother in the village. In the absence of any support she might have died by now."

But the officials have their own tales of woe. With only three probationary officers and a dozen junior employees, they cannot cope with the rush of the work—which has grown tremendously since the Asiad. Says an official: "It is almost impossible to contact the relations of every beggar and follow it up." As a result of the inaction, only 35 beggars could be released from the Kingsway Camp poor home last year.

During the last session of Parliament, opposition MP's created a furore in the house on the detention of labourers as beggars. Ram Bilas Paswan, a Janata member, visited the poor home in which a person from his native village in Bihar was detained. Following complaints from the MP's, Deputy Minister for Social Welfare P.K. Thungon made a surprise visit to a beggars' home.

Two weeks before the



1983-84	No. of inmates	Admission	Deaths
BEGGAR HOME-I	280	434	19
BEGGAR HOME-II	-	1,178	37
POOR HOUSE	342	645	8
HOME FOR MALE BEGGARS (D)	104	118	20
RCC	183	n.a.	45
MAHILA SADAN	127	214	35
HLTB (Non-Plan)	483	567	14
HOME FOR LEPROSY AFFECTED BEGGARS (Plan)	-	305	2
HADB (Lampur)	358	787	32
SEWA SADAN (Tilari Kalan)	530	568	9
HOIB (Narela)	201	484	122
MAHILA BHIKSHU GRAH	158	191	45

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

UTTAR PRADESH

Sordid Tale

DELHI'S beggar homes are eloquent testimony to the state of affairs in these institutions. But the one's in Uttar Pradesh offer another view of the sordid story. In December '83, 110 "beggars" were sent to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh and lodged in a cattle home soon after they were awarded a year's imprisonment in a summary trial by a Delhi court. Of these, 10 beggars died within three weeks due to malnutrition and lack of medical facilities.

Once news of the deaths leaked out, the Human Rights Institute, a Lucknow-based organisation immediately filed a petition before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, requesting a thorough probe into the affairs of the Ayodhya Beggars Home. The petition also urged that those who were not beggars be immediately released. The court appointed a five-member committee headed by Desh Rattan Sinha, an advocate, to visit the home and file a report.

But, even before the team started its investigations, the state Government suspended and arrested Daya Shankar Singh, the superintendent of the home and three others, under Section 304 of the Indian Penal Code for negligence leading to death. The team, however, went ahead, scrutinising records and conducting interviews with inmates.

In a 36-page report submitted to the court, Sinha severely indicted the Delhi administration for arresting labourers as beggars and sending them to Uttar Pradesh where they were forced to live in inhuman conditions. Says Sinha: "All of them were treated like animals before and after their death. And the money and materials meant for them was being pilfered."

The investigating team also took exception to the manner in which the dead bodies of beggars were disposed. Under Uttar Pradesh jail rules, the beggars home authorities have to seek prior approval of the district magistrate before disposing of dead bodies. The bodies of the 10 "beggars" who died, according to the report, were immersed in the Saryu river without any post mortem examination. While the home authorities maintained that the deaths occurred due to chronic illnesses, a check revealed that none of the dead was sent to hospital.

What appeared to be the most revealing and shocking point in the report was the arrest of labourers and innocent people as beggars. As the report further stated: "In some cases the name recorded did not tally with the name given out by the inmate. And in many cases the recorded addresses differed from the addresses given by the inmate." For instance Gura Singh, a resident of Ferozpur was declared in the case sheet as a resident of Bareilly.

Cases of this kind abound in the report. Sukhram Singh a cart-puller in Old Delhi was arrested from the Ram Lila grounds where he had gone to deliver some goods. Ratti Lal Keshav Lal, a toy peddler from Ahmedabad had come to Delhi to replenish his stocks. But to his horror the police arrested him as a beggar. Lal and Singh are not the only non-beggars to have shared this fate. The police have arrested blind women and even retired army men as beggars. At least five of the 40 female inmates of the Ayodhya Home disclosed that they were not begging when they were arrested. Said Sohilla, 26: "I was working as a dishwasher in Lajpat Nagar. I was arrested while I was returning home. In spite of my repeated requests, I was not allowed to contact my relations so that I could prove my bonafides."





Ratti Lal Keshav Lal (top) and Sukhram Singh: false arrests

With each inmate offering a sordid tale, and few listeners around, the fate of these innocent victims is hanging in the balance. Said Sinha caustically: "It is very unfortunate that a few poor people, having no social or economic clout were removed from New Delhi to make the city better for rich people."

—PRABHU CHAWLA

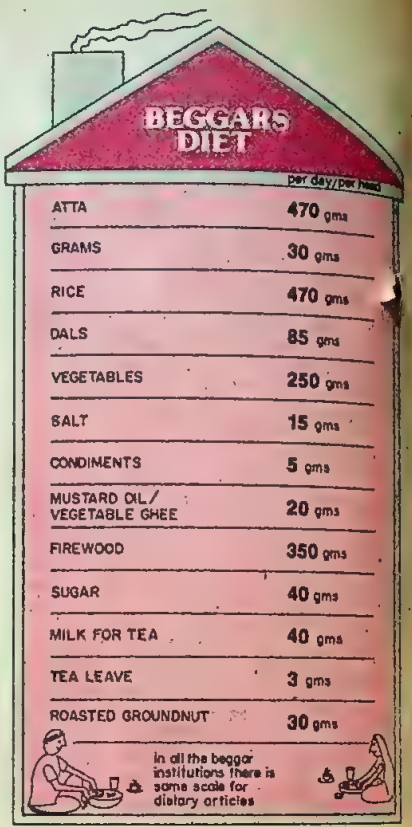


Chart by B K SHARMA

Meeting from the streets of Delhi were sent to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. Ten of them died. An inquiry by a Lucknow-based lawyer revealed that all of them were not even beggars when they were arrested. In fact one of them was a retired army jawan who had come to Delhi to settle his pension with the officials at Sena Bhavan.

NOW OVER 200 inmates of Delhi's homes have filed complaints with the authorities that they were not begging when they were arrested. Surender Nath Sharma, 35-year-old father of a son and two daughters, came to New Delhi in search of work for white-washing and painting houses. But just as he stepped out of New Delhi railway station on January 3, 1984, a police squad pounced on him and took him to the RCC along with 22 others.

After a summary trial he was imprisoned for a year. Lodged in the Kingsway Camp poor home, he has not been able to contact his relatives. Complains Sharma: "I pleaded helplessly with the police authorities that I had not come to Delhi for begging. But no one listened to me and now I find myself inside the jail."

In the adjoining RCC are others who alleged that they were rounded up only because they were shabbily dressed. Ram



A ward for arrested beggars and (right) detenus at prayer: tenuous existence



S. PREMI

Din, a 60-year-old petty shopkeeper from Rae Bareli, said: "My only fault is that I asked a policeman about an address in Darya Ganj. They put me in a truck and brought me here."

Police officials claim that they have only arrested people who were begging. A senior police official argues: "No accused will ever admit that he has committed a crime. All of them who were arrested were without clothes and money. Obviously they were beggars." The police were able to convince the courts of this as under the act, no witnesses need be produced. Only policemen and social welfare officials are quoted as witnesses and their complaints as first information reports.

Concerned by mounting public pressure, the Delhi administration recently started some window-dressing. In addition, it released some funds for the starving Social Welfare Department, whose budget was growing at the rate of 3 per cent annually. Former Lt-Governor Jagmohan even released funds from the state lotteries to improve the sanitary conditions in all the 12 homes.

But the officials still find it difficult to cope with the flood of beggars: by the end of May—though the anti-begging drive had been slackened—each one of the 12 homes was overcrowded. For example, as against a capacity of 300 in the Kingsway Camp home, there were 504 inmates. In the RCC there were 334 against a capacity of 240, in Lampur 450 against 120 and in Narela 320 against 120. Mrs Dhingra says: "My homes are bursting at the seams."

But Dhingra has found a way to ease pressure on the homes. With the help of the Delhi Development Authority, the Delhi Municipal Corporation, and the New Delhi Municipal Committee, she has found employment for over 400 beggars for widening of roads, digging and other such petty jobs. This practice, Dhingra claims, keeps the beggars busy. A part of the Rs 13 per day that they get is spent on transport and the balance deposited in their accounts. On his release, the person takes the balance with him.

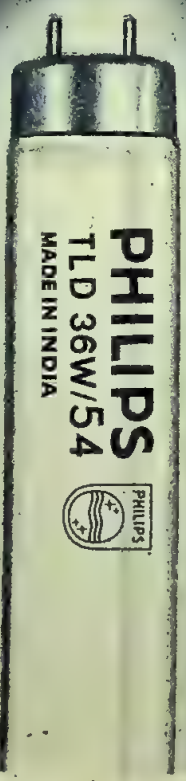
Though all the beggar homes are crammed full, the number of beggars on the streets shows no sign of declining. But one thing seems clear: notwithstanding a law that provides for a better life inside the poor homes, the beggars are better off outside. At least they are at liberty to move freely and eat what they can cadge—and live.

PHILIPS



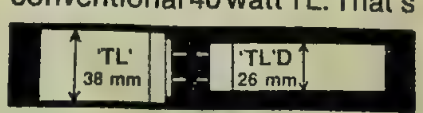
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A NEW BREW

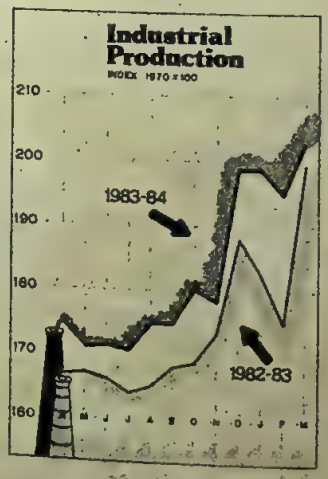
LIPTON (India) Ltd is all set to diversify into the soft drinks market. The new drink will be aimed at a more elite clientele than the one catered to by existing products, but company spokesmen are tight-lipped about other details. A number of other new products are also billed for an entry into the market-place. A range of pasta products — noodles, macaroni and vermicelli — is already being test marketed in four urban centres. These are a part of Lipton's plans to become not only the biggest but also the best known foods and beverages company in the country. Already, with the acquisition of Hindustan Lever's vanaspati, milk, edible oils and animal feeds factories in May this year, Lipton has become the biggest company in the field of foods and beverages, but it is yet to become the best known. The company has so far been marketing only tea, and executives are watching the market for a possible consumer reaction following the news that Dalda is no longer produced by Hindustan Lever.

STEPPING OUT

TATA Mills, taken over by the Government in October last year along with other troubled textile mills in Bombay, was about to change hands when the Government stepped in. The Tatas had virtually concluded a deal to sell the sick unit to S.N. Hada, the Calcutta-based sick unit expert with extensive experience in textiles. The deal fell through with the nationalisation. Earlier, the Tatas had tried to hand the unit over to Mohanlal Piramal, who had been made the company's executive vice-chairman as the first step to handing over the management to him. But, in an unexpected move that suggested second thoughts on the part of the Tatas, they had made Ratan Tata vice-chairman jointly with Piramal, who consequently stepped out of the deal. Meanwhile, company Chairman Naval Tata had started disposing of a part of the company's assets, in the form of the excess land it held in Bombay. Clearly, the group had been looking for ways to reduce its involvement.

GOOD GROWTH

INDUSTRIAL production appears to be gathering momentum with each quarter. In the last financial year, the first quarter saw a growth rate of just 3.4 per cent. This improved to 4.9 per cent in the second quarter, and picked up further to 5.3 per cent in the third quarter. The final quarter saw a quick burst, the growth rate hitting 7 per cent, so that the full year saw a growth rate of 5.2 per cent. This is marginally below the average growth rate of 5.4 achieved in the first four years of the sixth plan. But if the momentum of January-March 1984 is maintained, the current financial year should see the growth rate picking up to around 7 per cent, helped along by the lagged effects of last year's good harvest and the boost this will have given to both demand as well as the agro-based industries. Nevertheless, the full plan period will see industrial growth falling well short of the targeted 8 per cent annually.



ADVERTISING LINKS

THE BIG international advertising agencies seem to be making a bee-line for India, attracted by the possibility of business for them as a fall-out of the increased international business tie-ups being entered into by domestic companies. Foote Cone and Belding (FCB), one of the six largest advertising agencies in the world and ranking among the top five in the US, has recently tied up with a newly formed Indian agency, Speer Communications Private Ltd, in a deal that will give Speer access to FCB's expertise and know-how. Some months ago, Rediffusion had tied up with Ted Bates, and Everest with Saatchi & Saatchi.

DUTY BOUND

FURTHER changes are likely to be announced shortly in the duty structure for electronics components. A major revision had been announced nine months ago, bringing down the customs duty levels for most items as part of an effort to make the electronics components industry internationally competitive and to expand the domestic market for downstream electronic equipment. However, some anomalies had crept into the new duty structure, which are now planned to be removed. The last duty reduction has already helped bring about a substantial drop in the price of items like television sets, while a modest export base has been created for items like electrolytic capacitors and carbon film resistors. Components manufacturers are also planning investments at a level that will help them achieve greater economies of scale than earlier.

BAGGING ORDERS

GORDON Woodroffe, the Madras-based leather goods manufacturing, clearing, forwarding and airfreighting company that recently came under Piramal management, seems set for a major export thrust following the bagging of a large contract with Clarkes of the US for the supply of sophisticated shoe uppers. Other contracts include one for leather bags, while a licence has been bagged for manufacturing one lakh finished leather pieces every year for the export market. The supply of shoe uppers to Clarkes, which was restricted to a few samples during the last two to three years, has now shot up to between 12,000 and 15,000 pairs per month, worth up to Rs 15 lakh.

WORLD ECONOMY

View from the Summit



LONDON: It's all quiet on the western front, the western economic front, that is. The barricades in Whitehall and around 10 Downing Street have been dismantled, or nearly so, and the hooting police cars are silent. For the last three days, I have had a ringside seat at the show, for my room overlooks Trafalgar Square, and on a clear morning you can see right down Whitehall, past Downing Street on the right and Scotland Yard on the far left, up to the brooding statue of Winston Churchill across the road from the Houses of Parliament. On the last day of the summit, as the seven wise and powerful men from the West trooped into the Guildhall to listen to Margaret Thatcher, Trafalgar Square itself was filled with thousands of demonstrators protesting against President Reagan and his nuclear missiles, and also against Mrs Thatcher and her government. The demonstrators were drawn mainly from the large army of the jobless, now totalling around 3 million, who, however, do not figure in the final summit communique and have apparently no place in the programme for economic recovery discussed at such length at the high-powered conclave.

Mrs Thatcher did not expect much from the summit and she was right. Most western nations are doing better than they did at this time last year and are not too keen to change horses in midstream. After several years of stagnation, Britain's gross national product grew by 3 per cent last year and is expected to do the same this year. I was told by a treasury official that labour productivity in England has risen sharply since 1980—a year after Mrs Thatcher took over—partly because of the large decrease in the labour force and partly because of the relatively rapid rate of modernisation. This is also true of most other countries. Inflation has been brought under control—it is now less than 6 per cent a year in most countries except France and Italy—with the result that those who are lucky to have jobs, and they constitute nearly 90 per cent of the labour force, have seen their real incomes rise year after year. The rich, of course, have done better than the poor, but then this has always been the case during recessions.

I dined one evening with an old friend who is a senior civil servant in Whitehall. We had a seven-course meal that must have set him, or his expense account, back by at least a hundred pounds (Rs 1,500). He makes more than Rs 30,000 a month (before taxes) and had his salary recently raised by more than 6 per cent (Rs 2,000). Senior civil servants are paid exceedingly well by our standards but so are top business executives, many of whom make more than Rs 75,000 a month, excluding perks. In contrast, a man on the dole makes, if that is the right word, between Rs 800 and Rs 1,200 a week and a newspaper reported recently that between a fifth and a fourth of the households of the jobless have to make do with just one hot meal a day.

You would not notice it, of course, if you went round the West End and other fleshpots in the town and watched thousands of young men and women flit in and out of restaurants sampling the most exotic culinary fare this side of Suez. I walked down from the Connaught Rooms where the elaborate press centre is located—everything in the centre is free, courtesy Her Majesty's Government, including ten varieties of beer—to Lancaster House a mile or so away, where formal summit sessions are held, and counted over 400 restaurants with such unlikely names as 'The Grub' and 'Min To Woh', whatever that means.

In Covent Garden itself, a rather trendy place, there are perhaps more than two hundred eating places full of chattering boys and girls holding hands and elderly ladies from Cheltenham and Doncaster on a night out on the town. I am told that the areas affected by the recession are miles away from London—perhaps Wigan Pier is one of them—and things are still as bad there as ever.

There was a good deal of talk at the summit about interest rates and trade deficits, and, of course, the debt problem of the Third World but those are not their main worries. What actually worries most governments here is what is known rather vaguely as restructuring of industry. This means phasing out of old industries and replacing them with new ones but it is not as easy as it sounds. Britain, for instance, has ancient industries like steel and coal which once spearheaded her industrial revolution but which have now become museum pieces of little economic worth. Mrs Thatcher believes, and rightly so, that these industries have outlived their usefulness and have to go. With them, of course, go the people working there. For the last five years, her government has been busy shutting down ancient coal-mines and steelworks—some steel plants are as old as a hundred years—and providing incentives to the private sector to invest in new 'sunrise' industries like electronics and computers. In the process, millions of workers have been thrown out of jobs but the situation has now apparently stabilised around an unemployment rate of 12 per cent (of labour force). For nearly a year now, both unemployment and inflation rates have remained more or less frozen and Mrs Thatcher's advisers now believe that the worst is over and things should start looking up soon.

But how soon? Nobody in the Government knows, and if they do know, which is not likely, they are not sticking their necks out. I spent a whole day on the eve of the summit going from one economic department to another, shuttling back and forth, trying to find out if the planners had some kind of a time-horizon in view as far as full recovery was concerned, but without much success. Firstly, there are no planners in Margaret Thatcher's Government: the word itself is taboo. There are managers but they

Summit leaders in London: no sympathy for Third World problems



not pretend to manage the economy to the last decimal point as our experts back in New Delhi do. Hers is a non-interventionist administration and is hostile to the very notion of government action to move the economy this way or that. All that the administration does, or says it does, is to press a few monetary and fiscal keys, leaving recovery to follow, supposedly automatically. The budget is of course the main instrument and this year's budget sharply reduced corporate taxes, making it easier for private industry to take fresh risks in new lines and plan on a long-term basis. The planning, if any, is a matter for the private sector (and for those few public sector industries that are not being disposed of) and not for the Government. "We have to wait and see," said a treasury official when asked if he and his colleagues knew when the upturn was coming. But most people believe that 1985 will be a crucial year in this respect, unless there are sudden developments—like the war in the Gulf—to upset political calculations.

THE THIRD World does not figure very much in these calculations. I did not come across a single senior official who was enthusiastic about the new conference on money and finance suggested by the Non-aligned Meet (NAM), though a foreign office man who had spent some time in Delhi and was involved in the Commonwealth summit thought that the idea was worth pursuing. Mrs Thatcher does not believe in global solutions, nor, for that matter, does President Reagan. Both are keen on private investment in developing countries, something that is anathema to the governments of most such countries, and also to President Mitterrand of France who, like most socialists, is a great believer in global approaches and international initiatives, and wants a greater role in lending not just for individual projects but also for structural problems. But Mitterrand is an odd man out, not only because he has been speaking against the private enterprise approach of his partners but also because France has not done too well under him. France (and Italy) had among the lowest growth rates last year and also the highest inflation rates. While the rest of Europe is about to see the light at the end of the tunnel, France is still struggling with its problems.

I have a feeling that the Third World is in for a tough time in the years ahead. Margaret Thatcher may be speaking only for Britain right now but she will soon start speaking for Europe as well. She commands respect, not because she is tough but because her strategy is beginning to pay off. No matter what her critics on the left say, British industry today is far more efficient than it has ever been since the War. She took certain unpopular decisions on problems which her predecessors had swept under the carpet and which had to be taken if British industry was ever to stand on its own two feet. At the summit, she told her partners to do what she had done and I have a hunch that she will soon start telling the Third World countries to tighten their belts and get on with it.

Last month, the *Times*, an establishment paper if ever there was one, carried an editorial on India, virtually asking the World Bank to stop aid to us. The paper seemed to argue that we did not deserve aid because too much of it went to areas—presumably like the public sector—where it was misused. This is what Mrs Thatcher has been saying about investment in the public sector in her own country and I have a feeling that whatever the *Times* has said about India—the editorial has apparently created quite a sensation in Whitehall and elsewhere—will soon be said about other countries in the same boat. Margaret Thatcher does not believe that the poor deserve aid because they are poor. She believes that they are poor either because, like her own workers with strong trade unions backing them, they do not work hard enough, or shirk work, or just do not have the right incentive for work. Her attitude towards the Third World countries is no different from her attitude towards her own workers, particularly those who happen to work in public sector industries.

This is not what other countries in the European Community think but then other countries in the Community, with the exception perhaps of Germany, do not make such a big fuss about their new economic theology. Rome, for instance, views the problems of the Third World far more sympathetically than does Britain under Thatcher but then Rome does not wield much clout in the Community and is not inclined to throw its weight about. Mrs Thatcher has argued that poor countries do not need any special dispensation, as long as they ensure that, when the rich countries have recovered and are raring to go forward, they will come forth with the necessary raw materials and other inputs at the right prices and in the right quantities. It is not the kind of argument New Delhi would be prepared to buy, but then for Mrs Thatcher, as well as most of her partners in the summit, all such arguments should be decided by the market, not by bureaucrats sitting in wall-to-wall carpeted offices in Delhi or London or wherever, nor by bankers in Washington, even if they happen to be working for the World Bank. In Margaret Thatcher's new economic theology, the market is the final arbiter of wealth and poverty, growth and stagnation, and, in the final analysis, of right and wrong.



TAMIL NADU

Turbulent Times

"WE IN the south don't believe in corporate take-overs in the way that businessmen elsewhere do," M.V. Subbiah of the Madras-based Tube Investments (TI) group had said early this year. "The southern business culture is a conservative one, and people mind their own business."

Not any more, it seems; for the corporate world in Madras has been going through convulsions undreamt of a couple of years ago. Vintage business bastions of the south have had their boards shuffled around like a pack of cards, marauding businessmen from other centres have made surprise raids on established local groups, local dog-eat-dog scenes have been enacted, people put in charge of managing companies by the financial institutions have tried to corner shares, and in one case the state Government itself has made a share acquisition bid "to prevent the company from passing into outside hands". Suddenly, no bastion seems invincible in a shifting sands situation.

It all started in late 1982, with ITC gobbling up 30 per cent of India Cements shares at six times the face value of Rs 5 per share. Around the same time, Subbiah's own TI group bought a 25 per cent stake in E.I.D. Parry, the largest conglomerate in south India. And in July last year, Dilip Piramal of Blow Plast captured Gordon Woodroffe, the well- known leather manufacturing and clearing, forwarding and air-freighting company.

Close on the heels of this, last fortnight, the Coimbatore-based Lakshmi Machine Works, run by the venerable G.K. Devarajulu, bought controlling interests in its main local competitor, Textools. And a little earlier, after the ITC swoop on India Cements was nullified because of a dispute with the financial institutions, the Tamil Nadu Government made a bid to acquire a 10 to 15 per cent stake in the company. Meanwhile, S.N. Hada, nominated Binny chairman by the financial institutions, was lobbying intensely for a similar stake in the ailing textile and engineering giant. On a smaller plane, the Chemicals and Plastics (Chemplast) group of K.S. Narayanan has been quietly buying the shares of Mettur Chemicals, while the Bangurs of Calcutta mounted a raid on Seshasayee Paper and Boards, Tamil Nadu's premier paper mill located at Pallipalayam, Erode.

While most of the changes in management have been negotiated transactions, with the financial institutions often playing the role of intermediaries, Swraj Paul-type raids too have played their part in the take-over drama. In yet others, local entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the desire of overseas shareholders to disinvest.

Thus, the TI group bought Parry shares from Parry, Murray and Company Ltd; London. But M.V. Arunachalam, Subbiah's older brother, head of the TI group and now Parry chairman as well, is careful enough to stress that a few years ago Parry had asked him to take over as chairman but he refused, saying, "I don't want to take over unless I have a stake in the company. It is only after this that the shares were given to us."

Vintage business bastions of the south have had their boards shuffled around... marauding businessmen from other centres have made raids on established local groups. Suddenly, no bastion seems invincible.

The Gordon Woodroffe pattern is slightly different. Dilip Piramal's father-in-law S.L. Kejriwal, and a businessman based in the Far East, Atmaram Jatia, bought the 40 per cent stake in Gordon Woodroffe that was held by the parent company in London, after the shares had earlier been transferred to an Arab-Asian group. And Devarajulu of Lakshmi Machine Works had mounted a straight stock-market raid on Textools. But only the first lot of shares was registered by the company. An impasse followed, while the financial institutions kept neutral with their 15 per cent stake. Eventually, however, Devarajulu persuaded Textools Chairman and Managing Director S. Subramaniam to part with his 15 per cent holding, and last fortnight, a Lakshmi nominee replaced Subramaniam, who however stays on as adviser.

However, some other stock-market raids may not prove so successful. The Bangur attack on Seshasayee Paper is unlikely to get very far since the Tamil Nadu Government holds about 40 per cent of the company's shares, and the financial institutions another 15 to 20 per cent; and the state Government has made it clear that it does not favour business groups from other centres taking over local companies. Similarly, the Chemplast raid on Mettur Chemicals has not got very far, with only 11 per cent of the shares having been acquired so far.

The downstream activity has been equally frenetic. In Parry, both the company President, K.V. Raghavan, and the senior Vice-President, R.N. Ratnam, left last fortnight after M.V. Subbiah took over as vice-chairman. Another casualty was A.V. Karnik, who was general manager (engineering). Equally traumatic changes have been taking place at Gordon Woodroffe. Two full-time directors, S. Vishnu Mohan and A. Sreedharan, quit when Piramal moved on to the board with his associates, and the senior whole time director A. Ramamurthy is being replaced by Karnik of Parry. Yet a fourth person to leave is vice-president K. Satish Rao, while no fewer than a dozen other senior managers have resigned after the company recently changed hands.

The new company managements try to explain the shake-up in facile terms. Arunachalam argues that Raghavan's term as president is over, and that both Ratnam and Karnik are leaving because they have got better jobs elsewhere. But matters are not quite so simple, for he adds: "We are trying to bring about some improvements. And if some people feel they can't conform or that they have other ways of doing things, they are free to leave."

In a similar vein as Arunachalam's Ramamurthy of Gordon Woodroffe says: "People have left the company for their own personal reasons, and not because there has been a change of management. Vishnu Mohan retired in Ma... Sreedharan and Satish Rao left for personal reasons, and I am availing of leave before retirement for health reasons. The change of management has and will do the company a lot of good." But once again, it is clear that the sudden exodus of senior executives cannot be dismissed as having no connection with the change of management.

Some of the other changes are as drastic. Arunachalam says: "Parry had s

flabby culture, and we are changing all that." In one sharp burst of action, he has cut the labour strength at the sugar factory in Nellikuppam (South Arcot district) by 50 per cent, from 1,800 to 900, and closed down the ceramic tower packing unit at Ranipet in North Arcot. He says he is now taking a good look at the sanitaryware plant at Ennore, near Madras, which has not been doing too well.

Certainly, many of the companies involved needed some blood transfusion. Both Binny and Parry were known for their free-spending, easy-going club culture, with the managements either unable or unwilling to trim fat and face business challenges head-on. But all that is changing. Hada, inducted a couple of years ago into the Binny management, has stressed a new climate of austerity and had been able a year ago to pull the company out of the red before power cuts brought fresh problems. Parry has been in no better shape, with Arunachalam pointing out that the company has skipped dividends for seven years. This had not deterred senior managers and directors from helping themselves to lavish perquisites, with one of the directors even being given a dog allowance. When a Parry director used to leave his home for work, a servant from there would ring up the office to say that the great man was on his way, somewhat like the police control room being intimated about ministers' movements. Arunachalam now says the emphasis is on cost consciousness, improved operational efficiency and a modern system of management accounting.

THE EXCEPTION to this pattern is Textools, which had in fact been turned around by the management that has now been ousted because of the Lakshmi take-over. The company had been sick a decade ago, but was revived by Subramaniam. It was therefore becoming a fly in the Lakshmi ointment because of the aggressive selling of its textile machinery, particularly in north India, where Lakshmi would like to get a larger market share. Chitra S. Narayanaswamy, a well-known Madras sharebroker and a director in the Lakshmi group of companies, says: "The only idea behind the take-over of Textools was that Lakshmi Machine Works did not want any competition from local companies in the manufacture and marketing of textile machinery. As it is, they have to compete with up-country giants like Texmaco."

Subramaniam initially had the tacit support of the institutions in fighting off the take-over bid, but he finally decided to opt out of the fight because of failing health, and was able to part with his shares at a premium.

In fact, the results of even Parry and Gordon Woodroffe have not been very enthusing so far, considering that the new owners came into both companies a year or two ago. Parry's net profit after taxation, which was Rs 28 lakh for the 12-month period January-December 1981, was only Rs 33.6 lakh for the 18-month period from January 1982 to June 1983. On a pro rata basis, profits have therefore plummeted 20 per cent. In



(Clockwise from top left) Blow Plast's Piramal, Binny's Hada, Lakshmi's Narayanaswamy and TI's Arunachalam

fact, 1981 had seen a slight improvement over 1980 in profitability, so that the entry of TI brought about a reversal of fortunes. Arunachalam defends himself by saying that "we have been actively participating in the management of Parry only for the last six months or so"—but his group has in fact been on the scene for the last couple of years, and should have been overseeing operations.

It is the same story with Gordon Woodroffe. The new owners took over in July last year, well after the two-month lock-out in early 1983. Despite this, the loss of Rs 30 lakh incurred in 1982-83 (year ending June) is likely to increase substantially during the current year. The monthly profit of Rs 10 lakh that used to be made by the clearing and forwarding division has now dropped to Rs 8.5 lakh, a pattern that is repeated in the air-freighting division.

A. Ramamurthy, managing director, explains this by saying: "This is because we have not yet fully recovered from the after-effects of the 1983 lockout. There is still a lot of rivalry between the two major unions in our leather manufacturing division." But this does not fully wash, because these disadvantages should have been more than compensated by the profitable export markets that the company has tapped in the last year, exporting quality shoes and other leather products to prestigious clients abroad.

The Piramal entry has also put an end to past practices such as favouring employees' relatives while filling vacancies. After Piramal moved into place, every employee, including the directors, have been asked to furnish the names of relatives employed in the company.

While it is still too early to judge how the new managements in these companies will perform, the question of management take-overs itself has caused a flutter in the city. Addressing the annual general meeting of the Madras stock exchange, R.M. Ramanathan the president stressed the need for codifying company take-over regulations and giving this statutory sanction. "Unless some stringent statutory safeguards are provided, the propensity for exploitation by the unscrupulous would continue unabated," he said. Chitra Narayanaswamy points out in turn that "company take-overs are a normal phenomenon, but when there is a lot of money floating around, the stability and continuity of managements in companies should be preserved." And E. Krishnamurthy, the stock exchange's executive director feels that "block purchases of company shares should be regulated and controlled, as in the US and UK".

Whether these viewpoints hold water or not, there is no disputing that the rash of corporate shake-ups and managerial comings and goings have jolted a placid business environment. And the southern corporate scene may from now on be as turbulent as those elsewhere in the country.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

ESCORTS

A Crucial Stage

THIS affair doesn't look like it will finish before the end of the year," Swraj Paul said last fortnight in New Delhi, referring to his battle royal over share purchases worth Rs 13 crore in two Indian companies, Escorts and DCM. The air had been thick with rumours of a compromise settlement between Paul and the managements of the two companies, fuelled partly by Paul's sudden and unscheduled three-day visit to India. But at an informal meeting with journalists, Paul gave nothing away: "Nobody has approached me with a compromise offer, and I am not selling a single share that I have bought, not even at four times my price." In a determined bid to scotch all expectations of a settlement, Paul also denied that his visit to India had anything to do with either Escorts or DCM. "I have written a book on Mrs Gandhi, which is being released in London in early July; and I thought it would be only courteous to inform the subject of my book before it is released."

Nevertheless, compromise moves were already under way to try and find a way out of the 18-month-old imbroglio. The morning after Paul met the journalists, Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda sent an emissary, lawyer J.B. Dadachanji, to Paul with a proposal for talks. Paul replied that he had been advised by his lawyers in England not to talk to lawyers, and suggested a meeting with Nanda, with no lawyers present.

Dadachanji shuttled back to Nanda's residence, a couple of kilometres from Paul's hotel, and when Nanda agreed to Paul's suggestion, was back at the hotel with a proposal for a direct meeting. This time, Paul wanted a formal invitation from Nanda. So Dadachanji was back on the road to Nanda's residence, returning to Paul's hotel with a formal letter and a suggestion that the two meet at a second hotel in the city.

But Paul had left his hotel, leaving his two older brothers, Stya and Jit, to wait along with Dadachanji for his return. They waited through the afternoon, but there was no sign of Paul. Later in the evening, when he did show up, he had to rush off again for a meeting with Mrs Gandhi, and after that he was too busy packing before catching his flight back to London. The meeting with Nanda never materialised.

In an effort to get things moving, Stya and Jit meanwhile suggested a meeting between Nanda and them. On hearing of this from Dadachanji, Nanda was willing but met with strong resistance from his advisers and two sons, Rajan and Anil, who said that they and not their father should talk to Swraj Paul's brothers. A meeting was fixed accordingly, and the main combatants' lieutenants met at long last at a neutral hotel, at 9 p.m. The initial parleys continued for an hour-and-a-half, before Paul's brothers said they had to get back in order to bid Swraj goodbye.

Further parleys were now scheduled for Bombay, where Jit was headed over the week-end. And despite Swraj Paul's reluctance to deal with Nanda's lawyers, a meeting was fixed between two of Nanda's lawyers and Jit Paul. The Bombay meeting too proved inconclusive, and a third meeting was billed for later in the week, this time in Delhi.

The negotiations over the first two sessions made slow progress, getting bogged down on the question of whether the shares were legally purchased or not, with the two sides offering different interpretations of what was a legal purchase and what was not. Several other knotty issues came up, showing that the problem has got tangled in the share purchases themselves, in the court action on these, and in the steps taken by the financial institutions to sack the majority on the Escorts board. After all, if Nanda and Paul came to a settlement, would the Government then ask the financial institutions to retrace their steps? If so, would it not be an open admission that the sacking of the Escorts board was in direct retalia-

The negotiations between Paul and Nanda made slow progress, getting bogged down on the question of whether the shares were legally purchased or not.



HARI OM GULATI

Paul (left) and Nanda in happier times

tion to Nanda's refusal to register Paul's shares—something that the Government has so far denied?

There was, consequently, no knowing whether the negotiations would get anywhere. Paul had declared in Delhi that he would settle only if the company registered all—and not some—of his share purchases, plus pay him dividends on these shares for the period after which he had bought them. This is something that Nanda is not likely to accept, since he has held that shares illegally purchased cannot be registered. So Swraj Paul may well be right, and the battle could drag on for months.

Meanwhile, events were unfolding on two other fronts. After what must be a record six sittings, Escorts shareholders finally concluded their stormy and melodramatic extraordinary general meeting, convened by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC)—which holds a 30 per cent share in Escorts—to replace the majority of the company's directors. The high point of the meeting was a charged speech by one of the directors sought to be removed, Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw. He invited the shareholders' attention "to the arrogance displayed by the LIC that their director is not even present on the board sitting here with us", and asked the shareholders "to reject this contemptible resolution with the contempt that the resolution deserves."

BUT A day before the LIC's resolutions were due to be put to vote, three shareholders intervened by getting a stay order from the Delhi High Court on the ground that the meeting had been conducted illegally. The court fixed hearings on the petition to begin on July 5. But the Supreme Court instantly fixed a hearing for the next day on an appeal by LIC and vacated the stay order.

From Nanda's point of view, the vote is crucial. For one thing, the LIC and two other financial institutions have a 52 per cent share in the company and can therefore push through all the resolutions. For another, once he loses his majority on the board, Nanda all but loses effective control of the company. The only escape then will be court action.

The high court hearings in Bombay, meanwhile, were in full swing to determine whether the LIC action, as well as the Government's earlier clearing of Paul's share investments, were legal. Nanda's lawyer, F.S Nariman, argued for over a week, five hours a day, in an effort to prove mala fide intentions behind these actions. At the time of writing, the Government's lawyers were still to give their reply, and it seemed unlikely that the judgement would be available for another 10 days.

Meanwhile, back in Delhi, Nanda was getting ready for the normal annual meeting of Escorts shareholders, due to be held on June 30. Two resolutions on this occasion will be crucial: one concerning a Rs 35 crore debenture issue that will reduce the institutions' voting power in the company to less than 50 per cent, and the second concerning the reappointment of Nanda and son Rajan as managing directors of the company for a fresh term of five years. On the first, the financial institutions have so far expressed strong opposition. On the second, they expressed no dissent when the subject came up at the last board meeting; but that is no guarantee that they will not change their mind and vote against the reappointments when they are proposed.

The shareholders' meeting will show where exactly the institutions now stand on these two crucial issues. If they have shifted their stand in favour of Nanda, it will be one clear indication that the Government is willing to sue for peace, and to let Paul and Nanda sort the matter out between themselves. If the institutions however decide to oppose the resolution on the debenture issue as well as on the reappointment of the two managing directors, it will mean further trouble for Nanda. But in that event he is likely to defer these resolutions to a subsequent date—by which time, he hopes, an ammicable settlement will finally have been reached with Paul.

With court action now on in two centres, with shareholders' meetings overlapping, with negotiations on to sort the matter out, and with the Government seemingly weighing its stand on the whole matter, the over-all situation at the end of last fortnight seemed more confused than ever. Nevertheless, events seemed to be working their way towards some kind of a final conclusion.

The diversion, meanwhile, will be Paul's book on Mrs Gandhi, containing his assessments of her in public and private life, and of the problems she faces in running the country. Paul says he has also included his reasons for thinking that she is the best person for the prime minister's post. The 130-page maiden effort is priced at £9.95—equivalent to three Escorts shares at today's going rate. For Paul, certainly, the dividend on this is likely to be better than what he has got so far from his investments in Escorts.

—T.N. NINAN

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BEEF TALLOW

Cooking up a Storm

WHILE the raging political controversy over the beef tallow issue has faded into the background, it seems destined to re-surface, this time on another front: economic. Over a dozen leading business houses last fortnight collectively appealed to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Union Commerce Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh to review the import ban, imposed in November 1983, on 193 firms, who were accused of unauthorisedly importing or using beef tallow for their products. "Since we have been denied the facilities of importing even basic raw materials for our products we are on the verge of collapse. If the ban is not lifted immediately, not only will the country lose precious foreign exchange but the labour may face retrenchment," says the joint appeal.

These grim forebodings followed the May 1 Supreme Court judgement in which the Government was directed to review each case on the basis of merit. Although 60 firms had filed civil petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the ban order issued by the Chief Controller of Imports and Exports (CCI&E), the appeals apparently left the commerce minister unmoved. Said Singh: "How can one compromise with law? It is like killing a labourer and then seeking pardon on the plea that it will lead to the closure of the factory and retrenchment of labour. Let the CCI&E decide each case on its own merit. Extraneous and emotional pressures can't dilute the legal provisions."

The CCI&E last month rejected the appeal of Ludhiana-based Oswal Group of Industries to remove their name from the banned list and instead served them a three-year import ban order for its alleged involvement in the beef tallow import. The orders even cover individual directors of the group who have been disallowed to import any goods in their personal capacity. The Oswals, obviously took a grim view of the order. Said Abhey Oswal, chairman of Oswal Agro Mills Limited: "My company has been wrongly involved in the recent order issued by the Commerce Ministry. We have made a strong representation to the Government to rectify the order." Oswals were the second major group to be covered by the blanket ban, the first being the Jain Shudh Vanaspati (JSV), a Delhi-based firm and its sister concerns, who were restricted from importing for five years.

The exercise to identify the beef tallow importer's firms, began in September 1983 following a furore in the Parliament. The Commerce Ministry after scrutinising import documents discovered that over 350 import licences of various categories like replenishment, additional and advance licences were used for importing beef tallow after June 5, 1981, when its import was canalised through the State Trading Corporation (STC). Over 150 of these licences were issued to the exporters of diamonds, marine products, ready-made garments and engineering products. These licences were revalidated for a further period of six months after their expiry and, interestingly, all of them were used for importing beef tallow.



BHAWANI SINGH

Singh: "no compromise on law"

Since the import rules provided for the resale of these licences for actual users, many leading soap manufacturers and engineering companies used them for importing tallow for use in their products. Among the companies who brought in tallow were Hindustan Lever, Tata Oil Mills Company, Godrej Ltd, Liberty Oil Mill, Kamani Oil Industries and JSV. But all of them landed themselves in trouble when Singh started a crackdown on the importers to save the ruling party from public criticism.

In a series of confidential orders, issued in November 1983, the CCI&E initially imposed a six-month ban on 193 firms including M/s Ashok Leyland, Taxmaco, Greaves International, Kamani Oil Industries, Metro Exports, Godrej Soaps Limited, M/s Oswal Woollen Mills, M/s Oswal Agro Mills Ltd, M/s Amco Batteries, M/s Duncan International. The 193 firms including 15 gem, jewellery and diamond exporters who claimed to have exported goods worth over Rs 800 crore during 1982-83. The CCI&E's circulars stipulated that these abeyance orders might be kept secret and any firm making inquiries about their import licences might be told that their requests were under consideration. Since the CCI&E directed the licensing authorities, STC and MMTC to keep in abeyance for six months any applications received from any of the 193 firms for the grant of import licences or customs clearance permits and allotment of imported goods, the affected firms sought legal redress from the various high courts and a few of them like Godrej Soaps even succeeded in procuring stay orders, which were upheld by the Supreme Court.

The CCI&E is meanwhile scrutinising over 50,000 documents seized in connection with the beef tallow imports. Among the worst hit victims are the gems, jewellery and diamond exporters who claim they have lost over Rs 40 crore worth of exports. Diamond manufacturers had targeted diamond exports worth over Rs 200 crore during 1983-84 which they failed to achieve because of their inability to import rough diamonds.

Though it is difficult to calculate the economic loss due to the consequences of the ban, the companies are, however, exaggerating the losses in a bid to pressurise the Government into granting the import licences. According to Chandubhari Udeshi, the chairman of Bombay-based Metro Exports, dealing with small-scale sector products, his company has suffered heavy financial losses. Metro was the first recognised export house and its turnover rose from Rs 5.8 crore during 1981-82 to Rs 31 crore during 1983-84. But, according to Udeshi, his company's exports have crashed by almost 50 per cent from Rs 8.5 crore to Rs 4.35 crore in the first three months of the current financial year. Said a disturbed Udeshi: "They are punishing the country as a whole. It is not the loss of the exporter alone. This order will affect the entire exporting community and Taiwan and South Korea will benefit at our expense."

The problem for most leading export houses has been compounded by the fact that all of them were exporting at very low profits but were compensated by the granting of liberal licences which they could sell at a premium. With these facilities now gone, they find it difficult to compete with other countries. Admitted an exporter in New Delhi: "Why should I take risks by selling goods abroad even at a loss and earn foreign exchange for the

country? Earlier I could recover my losses, but there is no incentive now."

The impact of the abeyance order was felt at another level as well. Soap manufacturers were forced to use tree-born inedible oil for manufacturing soaps, but with a 20 per cent hike in oil prices, soap prices also had to be raised by 20 per cent. Moreover, soap manufacturers are being thrown out of the export market due to the high cost of production at home. In the case of vanaspati units, the ban has created an artificial scarcity and prior to the recent price rise of Rs 1.10 a kilo, vanaspati oil was being sold at a premium of Rs 3 to Rs 4 per kilo.

With the ban on Oswals, the already tight vanaspati situation is likely to get worse in the coming festival season. And with the Government taking a strong stand on the issue, the export-oriented business seems headed for a crisis. But regardless, hopeful business houses are pinning their hopes on the coming general elections. Said a confident exporter: "One can get any administrative decision reversed during an election year!"

— PRABHU CHAWLA with CHANDER UDAY SINGH

CALCUTTA

Bottleneck

SERPENTINE queues outside milk booths may be as common in Calcutta as in any other metropolitan city. But the odds on getting a bottle of milk at the end of the long wait are much worse. On an average, at least three days a week go by with milk not being delivered at all or, if it is, arriving already curdled. Last fortnight, with torrential rains paralysing most city services, not a drop of milk was forthcoming from the government dairy at Belgachia.



HARI OM GULATI

Chakravarti: hiking prices

Inured to essential services like power, transport and telephones being grossly neglected, the long-suffering citizens have added erratic milk supply to the list without too much complaint. But it seemed as if salt was being heaped on their wounds when the Government announced last fortnight that milk prices would be raised from 74 paise to Rs 1.50 per litre, depending on the type of milk. Animal Husbandry Minister Subhas Chakravarti who had earlier said: "I cannot raise prices unless the supply position improves," ultimately succumbed to bureaucratic pressure and slapped on the hike.

Despite repeated government assurances that the working of the Belgachia central dairy would be improved, inefficiency still persists. The dairy has a daily production target of 180,000 litres of bottled milk but in actual practise never exceeds the 20,000-litre mark. Of that, at least 60,000 litres are "toned" milk, a combination of powdered milk, butter oil and water of little nutritional value. The dairy imports 40,000 litres of raw milk from Nagpur, but this often gets curdled on the way.

Of the three bottling machines at the dairy, one has been out of order for three months. The remaining two also function erratically, and though officials insist that the bottles are hygienically cleaned, consumers very often find dirt in them. There have even been instances of rats bottled along with the milk.

After bottling, there is no certainty that the milk will make it to its destination. There are 114 vans to carry milk but because at least 50 per cent of them are usually in a state of disrepair, no more than 40 routes can be serviced daily. Consumers on other routes just have to go without milk.

Unable to stem the rot, both Chakravarti and Chief Minister Jyoti Basu pass the responsibility for all this to the dairy's 3,000 employees, 700 of whom are temporary workers. Says Chakravarti: "The situation has gone almost out of control because of irrational demands by workers and if this continues then we will have to close it down." In public meetings both Basu and Chakravarti have hit out at a demand allegedly made by the workers for a four-hour work day. The workers deny making such a demand, and retort: "The ministers are trying to blame us to cover the administration's inefficiency."

All these accusations only distance the day when the Calcutta consumer will stop getting milked for his hard-earned money.

—SUMANTA SEN

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ROHTAS INDUSTRIES

Family Drama

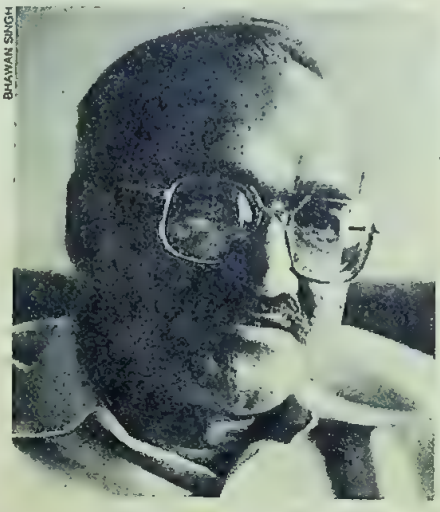
IT WAS a corporate change of guard with some family drama thrown in. Last fortnight, when negotiations began for the sale of the 52-year-old Rohtas Industries (estimated 1983-84 turnover: Rs 130 crore), the history of one of the country's oldest industrial clans began to come full circle. For Sanjay Dalmia, owner of Golden Tobacco and other units of the Dalmia group, who is poised to grab the control levers of Rohtas, is the nephew of its founder, the late Ramkrishna Dalmia. The present owner Ashok Jain of the Sahu-Jain group is the son of Shanti Prasad Jain, the senior Dalmia son-in-law who wrested control of the company way back in 1948 following partition of the Dalmias' assets.

The take-over bid raised eyebrows for the scale of difference it would have made to either of the men. For Dalmia, it should mean a 50 per cent expansion of the group's annual sales: from Rs 250 crore at present to Rs 380 crore. For Jain, the loss of Rohtas will slash his empire by half leaving him with Bennett Coleman, New Central Jute Mills and Andhra Cement. "I am not turnover conscious, still it has been a hard decision for me to make," Jain said, "but I thought it'd be better to utilise my energy and money in technologically more modern industries."

Jain's rueful note was a paradox, because many observers actually thought it was good riddance. The company, though having a diversified product mix ranging from paper and boards (70 per cent), cement (20 per cent), asbestos cement products, vulcanised fibre and vanaspati, had been in a financial coma for the past two years. The directors' report for 1982-83 says: "The year under report experienced the worst ever set-back in the working results of the company recording a loss, before depreciation, of Rs 9.82 crore against the figure of Rs 54.67 lakh in the previous year." The sales and production of all products except cement showed drastic decline.

Apart from shoddy management and obsolescent machinery—there was no major modernisation of the paper unit since 1957—Rohtas' biggest undoing was power. The Bihar State Electricity Board (BSEB), which barely met a half of Rohtas' Dalmianagar factories, dealt it a staggering blow in 1982 when it cut off supply for months on the ground that it had not cleared a bill of Rs 3 crore against fuel surcharge. Starved of care and capital, and beleaguered by frequent labour strife, the company had to apply for being declared a sick unit and the rehabilitation package that comes along from the financial institutions and the state Government in such circumstances.

Jain says he tried his best to save the flagship company of his group. In September 1982, he moved the lead financial institution, the Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI)—as well as the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI)—for a rehabilitation fund of Rs 38 crore, to be shared with the state Government. However, 18 months later, in March this year, the institutions agreed to shell out the money. The state Government too had agreed to the proposal of sharing the responsibility but insisted on inserting a clause stating that in the event of the company being sold, repayment of its own debt should be *pari passu* (simultaneous) with the institutions. Normally, in such events, the financial institutions get priority.



BHAWAN SINGH

"I am not turnover conscious, still it has been a hard decision for me to make."

—ASHOK JAIN



BHAWAN SINGH

"I know Rohtas has problems and a seller sells something only when he faces problems."

—SANJAY DALMIA

Rohtas insiders maintain that the state Government had been less than fair to it in its dealings. The Bihar Government has a scheme by which sick units are allowed exemption of sales tax for seven years, which is then converted into interest-free loan. But, in the case of Rohtas, the state Government refused this facility for more than five years.

Dalmia moved in after Jain's negotiations with the state Government as well as the IFCI and the IDBI had fallen through. "I know Rohtas has problems," said Dalmia, "and a seller sells something only when he faces problems." Though kept a closely guarded secret, the market began responding to rumours of the company changing hands for some weeks now. The lackadaisical Rohtas shares, valued till recently at Rs 5 a scrip, recently moved up to Rs 9 and then dipped to Rs 8.50 to be stationary at that level.

Still nobody knows the amount for which the company may ultimately change hands. With the institutions owning less than 5 per cent in the company, and the shares being farmed out widely, the Sahu-Jain group is believed to control the company with a little less than 20 per cent. Dalmia does not want to commit himself on the final price without getting a fix on the company's liabilities which may be "as high as Rs 6 crore or more". But, whatever the burden, Dalmia is hopeful that the company will turn the corner given "some capital and a bit of luck". And Rohtas is after all not a bad buy, considering its 1,000-acre land, its sprawling complex of buildings, and equipment and machinery worth over Rs 200 crore.

For Dalmia, the acquisition of Rohtas holds out the promise of putting him in the big league with a corporate image his family has never achieved since the Dalmias' fortune declined in the '50s. For Jain, who is planning to branch out into electronics and telecommunications, the sale could means access to much-needed capital.

—SUMIT MITRA

SUGAR

Coming Crunch

WAREHOUSES across the country were stacked to the ceiling with sugar. Supplies to the market, dictated by the Government, had reached an all-time high. Sugar prices on the open market remained steady at just Rs 1.50 more than ration shop rates. And government negotiators in Geneva last fortnight were busy arguing for a higher sugar export quota under the international sugar agreement on the plea that India's huge production surpluses justify increased exports.

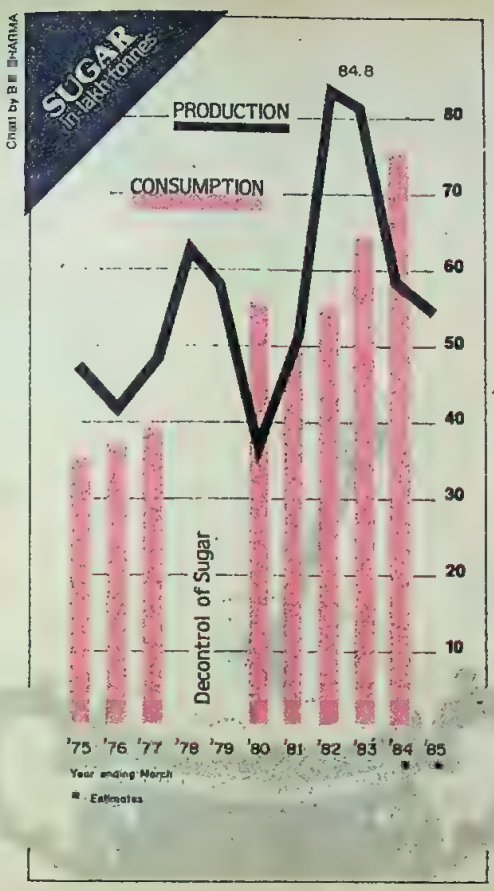
But in the face of apparant plenty, an incongruous crisis of scarcity was brewing in the sugar industry. And India's sugar boom could soon go bust. In the light of this, the Government's euphoria about large sugar stocks and its consequent stress on increased releases and export promotion seemed unjustified.

Sugar production in the current year slumped drastically to 59 lakh tonnes, a 28 per cent decline from the 1981-82 peak of 85 lakh tonnes, and an over 30 per cent decline from the 1981-82 peak of 85 lakh tonnes. Sugar supply remained comfortable only because of an enormous carry-over stock of 46 lakh tonnes—an all-time high—from the surpluses of the last two years. But both current production and industry projections for the next season make it clear that a sugar scarcity may be round the corner.

Most people agree that production in the sugar year starting this October, will be below the current year's levels. Private sector sugar baron S.K. Somaiya, whose diversified Godavari group includes large sugar manufacturing and trading companies, pegs his most optimistic estimates of next year's output at just 59 lakh tonnes, the same as this year. M.S. Marathe, managing director of Maharashtra's Federation of Sugar Cooperatives, Sakharsangh, is sure that it will be under 55 lakh tonnes.

Sugar economist S.M. Gothoskar, formerly Sakharsangh's business economist, argues that 1984-85 production will not cross 51 lakh tonnes. Says he: "Sugar production now has a well-established cycle of dropping 40 per cent from peak levels within three years of the high. A confused government policy coupled with inordinately large releases this year has ensured that this will be repeated."

Simple arithmetic makes the impending crisis clear. If releases and exports



are maintained at current levels, the carry-over stocks at September-end will be 22 lakh tonnes. Assuming that the Sakharsangh estimate of 55 lakh tonnes production in 1984-85 is correct, total availability will be only 77 lakh tonnes—just enough sugar next year to maintain current consumption levels, and leaving no export surpluses. But on October 1, 1985, three months before the new sugar actually pours into the markets in sufficient quantities, the warehouses will be empty. The only solution, other than the politically difficult choice of curtailing monthly releases and allowing prices to rise, will be to import three months stock of sugar, or close to 20 lakh tonnes.

Sugar for both the public distribution system and for open market sales is released by factories on the basis of monthly orders from the Union Civil Supplies Ministry. Both pricing and the free sale quota have been dictated this year by consumer-oriented compulsions, rather than economic considerations aimed at stable farmgate prices for sugarcane. Thus, in a year when production dropped sharply, suggesting the need for conserving sugar stocks, the Government ordered steeply increased releases to depress prices and keep consumers happy.

The releases have been pegged at the sharply enhanced annual level of 75 lakh tonnes, 36 per cent higher than the 55 lakh tonnes consumed two years ago. Said Somaiya: "What the Government is doing is nothing but a display of foolhardy bravado. If you keep sugar prices artificially low today, the prices will be literally beyond your control next year, when you will have neither the stocks nor production to feed the market."

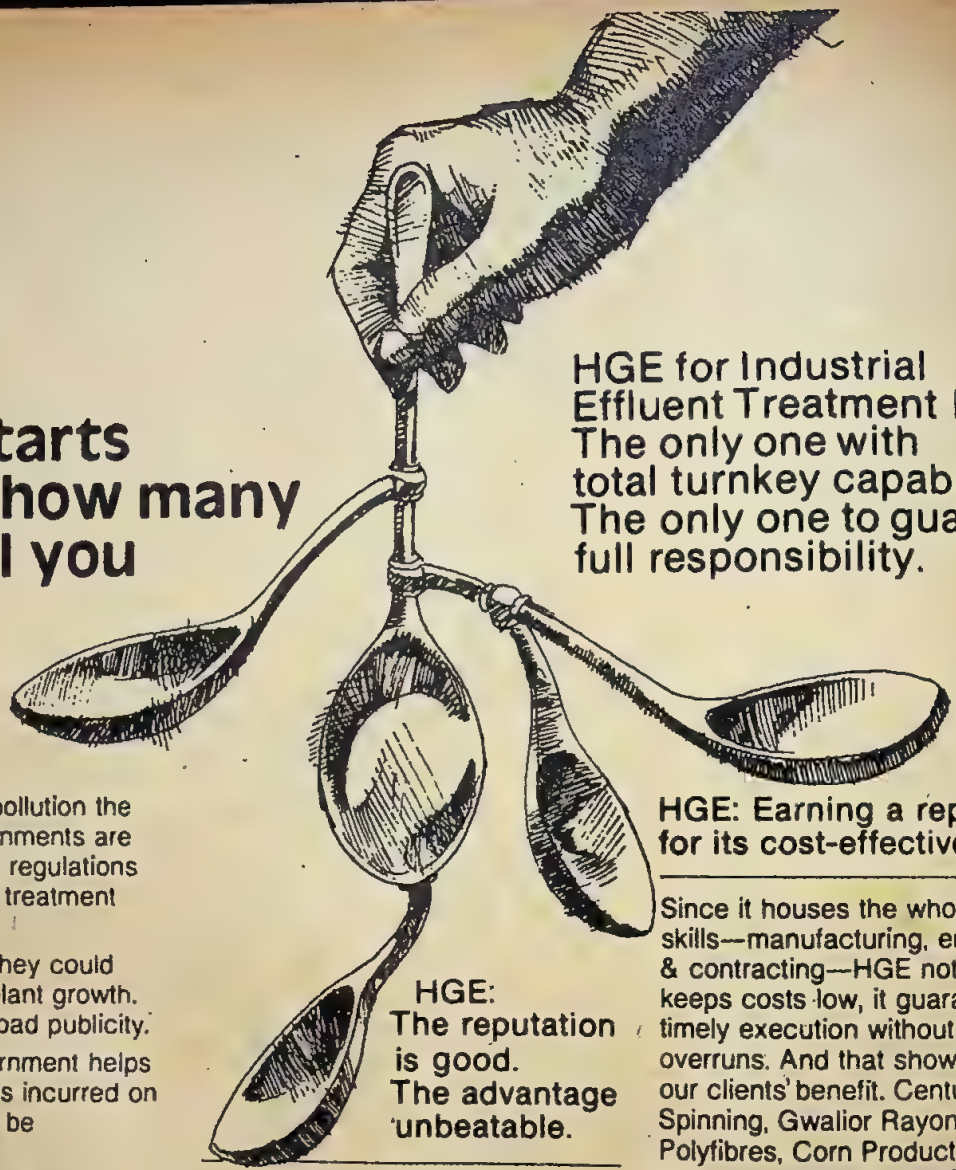
Prices apart, plan goals have also gone out of the window. The Sixth Five-Year Plan, running till March next year, had envisaged domestic consumption of 66.4 lakh tonnes this year, with production being far higher at 76.4 lakh tonnes. Instead, the virtual dumping of sugar on the market in order to keep prices down has pushed consumption in the fourth year of the plan to 75 lakh tonnes, a figure almost impossible to reduce in future. On the production side, while output surpassed plan targets by early 1982, it could slump in the last year of the plan, leaving a shortfall of over 20 lakh tonnes.

Official shortsightedness has been clearly on display. This year, the Government estimated production at 75 lakh tonnes. As late as March 7, a statement in the Lok Sabha by Civil Supplies Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad pegged production at 72.75 lakh tonnes, even though a number of factories had already downed their shutters by then, instead of running on to June, as they had done a year earlier. In fact, all sugar factories except one stopped crushing cane by April 15, because the cane had simply run out.

Said Marathe: "The ministry remains optimistic even though we are already in a very deep crisis, and their only consideration is consumer prices. In the last three years, there has been a continuous decline of 30 per cent in the weighted average price paid for sugarcane to farmers, so cane plantings have declined badly. It is unlikely that we will produce even 55 lakh tonnes next year."

In sharp contrast with these gloomy forecasts, a joint secretary in charge of sugar was sent to Geneva in mid-June to fight for an export quota of 15 lakh tonnes, which might be the very figure the country may need to import next year. At home, meanwhile, sugar markets showed a buoyancy which was restrained only by the announcement of large July releases and speculation about imports. For consumers, who have not forgotten the bitter taste of 1979's sky-high sugar prices (touching Rs 15 per kg in some places), the days of abundant supplies of cheap sugar might once again become just a sweet memory. —CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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CHAITRA-88-215 B.

COMPUTERS

The Class Revolution

THE ACRONYM is apt. Called the Computer Literacy and Studies in Schools (CLASS) programme, it is designed to initially teach about 9,000 students in 250 schools nation-wide the ABC of computers. Things are still iffy, but if the Government-initiated experiment proves successful and the project is extended by 1990 to 2.5 lakh schools, the figure being mentioned, the market for computers could explode.

Under the Government's one-year pilot project, which is likely to be extended by another year, class 9 and 11 students who so desire will be lectured for 30 hours a year on everything they wanted to know about computers but didn't have the opportunity to ask. In addition to this, in a further 60 hours a year, they will also be provided practical, 'hands-on' experience in handling computers. Later in the programme, promises P.L. Malhotra, director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the computer will be used as an educational tool to teach a vast array of subjects including physics, chemistry, mathematics and geography.

One likely offshoot of all this is the emergence of a new profit frontier for the computer industry and software producers. An educationist associated with CLASS observes that computers might be installed in 30,000 schools by the end of the seventh plan. Each school will need at least two microcomputers. Considering that there are barely 13,000 computers in the country, including 10,000 microcomputer, that opens up a sizeable market for computer manufacturing companies. The educationist assesses the total software market at Rs 3 crore by seventh plan-end, presuming that a minimum Rs 1,000 worth of software is required by each of the 30,000 schools. The hardware and software figures are likely to balloon considerably if 2.5 lakh of the country's 6.5 lakh schools are covered by 1990.

Thus, though everything is nebulous at the moment, Arjun Malhotra, marketing director of Hindustan Computers Ltd (HCL), cautiously ventures: "We've got a proposition in terms of hardware and software if government policy is clarified." DCM is examining the possibility of introducing microprocessors in the market, says the company's Product Manager, Kapil Jain, and Tata Burroughs wants to produce software for schools. Numerous other microprocessor manufacturers are trying to or entering the education market. Vinay Rai, vice-president of the Delhi-based Usha Microprocess Controls Ltd (UMCL), estimates on the basis of a study by his company that by 1990 one lakh computers a year will be in demand. "The majority of this demand will be for microprocessor-based systems," adds Rai.

Software producers in turn are making a bee-line for the NCERT, the main software selection and approval body. Confirms A.K. Jalaluddin, the head of NCERT's science and technology department: "Between the end of March and mid-June, 20 companies sounded us on selling to or producing software for us." Among them: Eiko Computers Ltd, Bangalore; Electronics Sale and Consultancy Services, New Delhi; Software Research Group, Bangalore; Hindustan Computers Ltd, Keltron, West Bengal Electronics Development Corporation (WEBEL), representatives of Apple Computers Ltd (USA) and of a well-known French company.

Amidst these first stirrings of activity, the first small step towards computer literacy in schools was taken last fortnight when 750 schoolteachers assembled in 17 "resource centres" to learn the basics of computers on 170 imported BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) microcomputer systems. The number of resource centres—places like the Indian Institutes of Technology, where computer know-how exists—is likely to shoot up to 45 by this month, says NCERT's Malhotra, as will the number of computers.

When CLASS goes to the classroom this month, 500 BBC Model B micros will have been installed in five private schools, 75 central schools and assorted government or government-aided schools, plus others at the resource centres. In all, 900 computer systems will have been imported and installed by this month, part of a hardware and software package deal with the UK Government. The English language software consists of a "welcome package" to initiate users into operating computers, an introduction to LOGO (the language) and DART graphics, a computer-based learning (CBL) package of physics, chemistry, maths and geography "O" (for ordinary) and "A" (for advanced) level programmes, word processing (editing on computers) and quest (manipulating data on computers) packages, a microprimer easel activity guide introducing users to BBC micro commands particularly those relating to sound and graphics, and a chess game.



HARI OM GULATI

The BBC Acorn microcomputer at the NCERT: welcome package

The Government-backed programme in one sense is no trail-blazer—the private sector long ago gained a foothold in the market. HCL claims to have sold its Workhorse computer model (priced at Rs 59,500, though this would vary according to customer requirements) to nearly 25 schools. DCM's Jain avers that his company has sold the DCM Tandy (price: about Rs 28,000) to around 20 schools, and Rai of UMCL admits to having installed 15 computers in schools. What

marks these efforts, however, is that the private sector has clearly ignored the middle and low end of the market in favour of upmarket clientele like public schools. In contrast, the Government's pilot project is introducing cheap (Rs 10,000-Rs 12,000) micros to the low and middle segments of the market.

A senior government official points out that the Semiconductor Complex, Chandigarh, which will make a chip compatible with that used in the BBC (Acorn) micro, can design its own micros and distribute the technology to whoever wants it. This may usher in the micro revolution, enabling Indian computer manufacturers to produce and market cheap micros. It would also impose some uniformity on a market where about 70 different models of micros now reign. But standardisation may not be hurrahed by all in the computer industry. Rai of UMCL, for one, claims that standardisation would result in obsolescence as newer developments would be lost track of. Moreover, the whole effort is too vast and slow for the Government to tackle by itself, he argues. "Computer technology changes rapidly. Do you think there'll be no further developments in two years?" Rai cites the example of a Calcutta-based company that spent Rs 4 crore on computers and bought 8-inch floppy drive from BASF. "Today no other country except the USSR uses 8-inch floppy drive technology. The price of the 8-inch floppy drive is 2.5 times that of the 5¼-inch in India, and five times the price abroad."

While the industry is generally gungho about any long-term plan to introduce computers on a mass scale in schools, some regard the official programme as unplanned, a view endorsed by the CLASS educationist. "It's scary because of the infrastructure required," says HCL's Malhotra. "A lot more is involved in introducing computers in schools than dumping the hardware — an entire support system, trained teachers, equipment maintenance, refresher courses, and books."

"To the best of my knowledge, nothing has been done so far in software by Indian publishers," concedes Zamir Ansari of Penguin Overseas Ltd. They just don't have the resources and expertise to produce software at the moment, he adds. Nonetheless, a Bombay-based scientist argues: "There are hundreds of questions to which there are no answers today, but I think the only option for us is to go ahead because otherwise we will never be ready." Evidently, one small step for the Indian child is better than none.

— PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

ADVERTISING

Post Haste

FOR THE last two months election results have been the hottest topic of conversation among Bombay's ad men. And the result in question is those of the election for the presidentship of the 40-year-old Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI), which took place on April 30.

For a month and a half the AAAI executive fobbed off questions from members about the procedures followed by the scrutinisers in rejecting and accepting votes. To most queries Vice-president P.V. Gadgil issued a standard response: the working committee had looked into the matter and was satisfied. But far from being forgotten, the letters to the executive committee demanded an inquiry. Finally last fortnight, a one-man inquiry committee of former AAAI president R.K. Swamy was constituted.





Sista (above) and Pereira: disputed election

Swamy's findings proved conclusively that there had been discrepancies. Several irregular votes were declared valid, and invalid votes wrongly accepted. Sixteen advertising agencies were found to have sent proxies in favour of both the candidates, S.V. Sista, managing director of Sistas Pvt Ltd and Roger C. Pereira, president and chief executive of Shilpi Advertising Ltd. And by a convenient "oversight", five votes were overlooked in the final tallying.

Strangely enough, there were no protests on the counting day when Pereira won by a four-vote margin over Sista's 40 votes. Only Avinash Jain of Jainson's, Sista's campaign manager, was not satisfied with the results. "We had expected to win 50 votes and I was completely taken aback by the result even though I myself won a position on the executive," he observed. Within two days, Jain wrote demanding an explanation as to why, though 92 members of the association had either voted personally or by proxy in the presidential election, only 84 votes were accounted for. He also noted that three unauthorised persons had cast their votes.

Following the inquiry report, the AAAI executive committee on June 11, resolved to resign unanimously and call for fresh elections, now scheduled for July. Although the majority of the 12-member AAAI executive committee stepped down, Pereira did not. He further declined to comment on the present situation.

"A lot of false accusations have been made," he said, adding that he would step down later after calling for an extraordinary general body meeting as the AAAI constitution did not provide for the resignation of the executive committee. However, lawyers to whom the AAAI referred the matter feel that Clause 24 (E) of the constitution adequately covers the eventuality of fresh elections where the entire executive committee has unanimously agreed to resign.

Till just two years ago, the AAAI elections were genteel affairs where presidents were elected unanimously. But now the posts are keenly contested. "Canvassing this year descended to street level," says Larry Grant, managing director of Artig Advertising, referring to the letter sent out by Pereira decrying the unsuccessful efforts of the AAAI executive committee to settle a dispute with the Indian and Eastern Newspapers Society.

Most ad men however, are tight-lipped about the happenings. Even Sista was reluctant to comment. Said he: "Whatever has happened we must try and keep matters within the association. I am sure we are all mature enough to sort it out among ourselves." Ad men are also jittery about the image of their profession being tarnished. Said Harish Mahindra, president of the Indian Society of Advertisers: "The elections in the AAAI are its own internal matter but I am concerned insofar as attention is being side-tracked from the important issues we are fighting for with the Government. So that the advertising profession speaks with one voice, we must ensure that our house is in order." Clearly, ad men could do with some polishing of their images.

— COOMI KAPOOR


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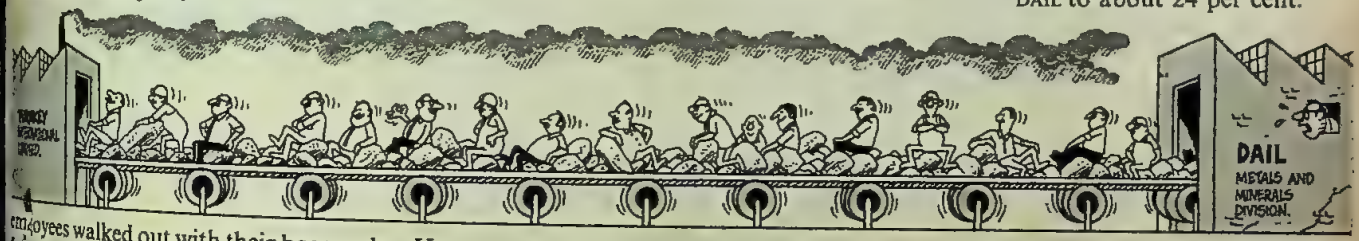
South Zone:

DAVY ASHMORE

Spanner in the Works

DAVY Ashmore India Ltd (DAIL), the Calcutta-based engineering and construction company, is in turmoil, what with mass resignations at its money-spinning metals and minerals (M and M) division, a liquidity crunch and allegations of a window-dressed balance sheet. When K.K. Datta Gupta, the head of DAIL's M and M division, decided to troop out of the company at the end of last month, 152 of the division's 300 employees took the unprecedented step of following suit. A simmering feud with DAIL Managing Director P. Sen finally came to the boil when Datta Gupta's contract was not renewed, and he quit when the company board backed Sen. That's when events took an unexpected turn. The majority of the employees walked out with their boss and formed a new company, Turnkey International Ltd.

The mass resignations at the profitable Minerals and Metals division spell trouble for an already beleaguered DAIL. While this division contributed Rs 99 lakh to profits in 1983-84, most other entities made losses.



This was perhaps understandable: most of them had originally belonged to Head Wrightson India Ltd, headed by Datta Gupta until its merger with DAIL in April 1977. And within a few days of its formation, Turnkey International received two contracts. This, crowed former senior DIAL manager Ashish Dasgupta, "is indication of our credibility that will grow with our new company".

The mass resignations at the profitable M and M division spell trouble for an already beleaguered DAIL (1983-84 turnover: Rs 40.71 crore). While the M and M division contributed Rs 99 lakh to profits in 1983-84, a sizeable increase from the Rs 16 lakh in 1978-79, other entities like the Kharagpur engineering factory made an estimated Rs 62 lakh loss in 1983-84. The only other major division to consistently make it to the black is the construction division (an estimated Rs 145 crore in 1983-84).

To compound DIAL's problems, the State Bank of India, its principal banker, is concerned that the company has piled up big short-term debts, apart from its term loans. DAIL's intercorporate loans at the end of last March stood at Rs 1.3 crore, apart from bank overdrafts of Rs 3.85 crore, both almost doubling from March 1983 levels. Recently, it failed to repay in time loans taken from Rallis India and Mayni Shipping. A Rs 5 lakh cheque drawn in favour of Mayni Shipping actually bounced early this month. However, both companies were paid a few days later.

The liquidity crunch is not denied by the management. "Most of our clients are public sector undertakings who cannot help the delays in clearing bills," says Company Secretary M. Natarajan, referring to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd, which had blocked payments of Rs 1.82 crore. But former DAIL executives retort that the company's internal problems cannot be laid at the door of one or two factors. For instance, they point out that remitting more than Rs 67 lakh in royalty, engineering and supervision fees to Davy McKee (Sheffield) Ltd, the parent company, at a time (1983-84) when DAIL was neck-deep in short-term loans cannot be considered prudent financial management.

Some former executives also charge the company with manipulating its accounts to show profits when in fact many contracts have resulted in its ledgers being splashed with red ink. A Bharat Aluminium (BALCO) contract, scheduled to have been completed in 1979, has been kept open although no more money is expected to flow from BALCO. The Rs 41 lakh loss resulting from the contract has not been shown in the 1983-84 accounts as a loss, but as work in progress. Similarly, the Rs 15 lakh loss incurred in a Mishra Dhatu Nigam contract has not been entered in the books. Further, losses amounting to several lakh rupees arising from various contracts, including those with UP Brass, Rourkela Steel Plant and Mukund Iron and Steel, have been deferred to the balance sheets of years yet to come.

The flak directed at the management has, as its backdrop, the Tata Iron and Steel Company's (TISCO) bid for a sizeable stake in DAIL. Last year, TISCO bought 7.43 per cent of DAIL shares from the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation. Government approval for a further 10 per cent share transfer from the parent company is awaited. The British company plans to reduce its shareholding to about 26 per cent from its present 40 per cent. TISCO hopes to buy these shares and increase its stake in DAIL to about 24 per cent.

"The Davy Ashmore management desperately wants to present a picture of good financial health because this deal is at stake," claims a former DAIL executive. Also at stake, he adds, are the company's plans to raise Rs 1.2 crore through a rights share issue; that might get a poor response if it is known that the company is suffering and far from being in the pink of financial health.

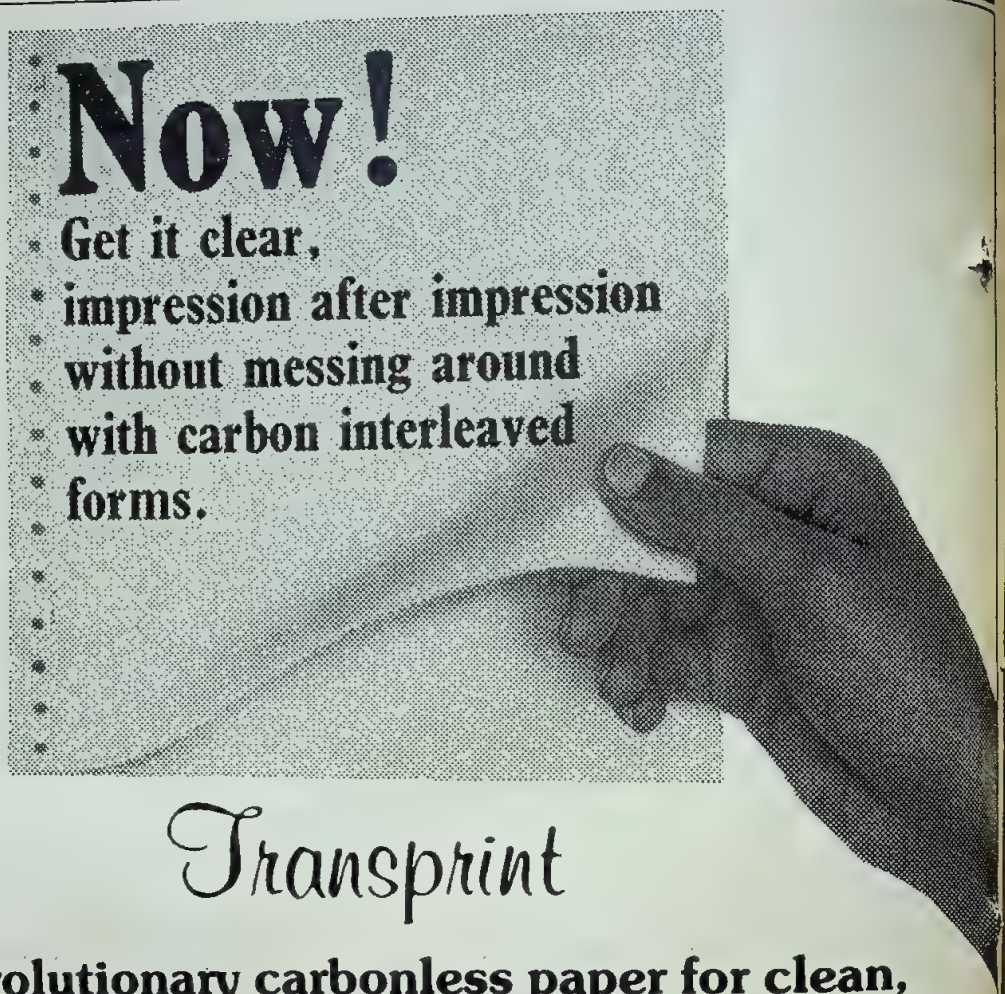
But TISCO Vice-Chairman Russi Mody shows no signs of developing second thoughts on the deal. And DAIL boss Sen shoots down the allegation that the management wants to present its best financial face. He also claims that the mass resignations and the financial problems of DAIL will not adversely affect the company's rights issue or for that matter its future.

The management insouciance seems to be shared by the stock market: DAIL equity, after tumbling from Rs 20 to a low of Rs 17 after the news of the mass resignations travelled the market grapevine, climbed to Rs 19 a week later. But whether DAIL will weather the storm remains to be seen.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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EXPORTS

The Zones of Hope

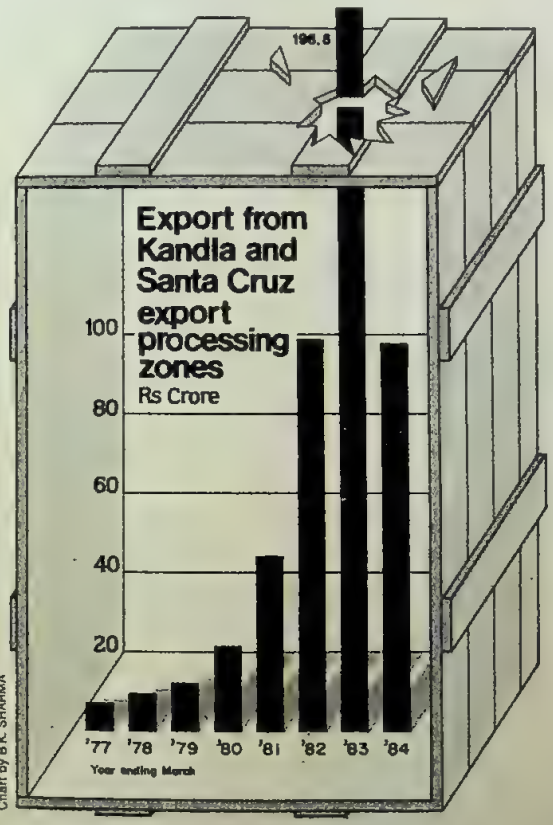
THEY'RE the Government's great new export hope. In a bid to push up foreign exchange earnings, vital with the trade deficit at over Rs 5,000 crore, four export processing zones (EPZ's) are to be set up in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and on the outskirts of Delhi by 1985-end. Each, the Centre hopes, will export goods worth over Rs 100 crore at optimum working level. Companies will be formally invited this month to set up shop at the zones to produce solely for foreign markets, the bait being a five-year tax holiday, a wide range of other concessions and less red tape as well.

The initial response has been overwhelming. According to the Commerce Ministry's latest head count, over 1,100 hopefuls have queued up for entry into the four zones. The number of those who manage to make it ultimately will be far slimmer. Nonetheless, the figure is impressive, considering that the Santa Cruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) in Maharashtra started off with five or fewer members in 1973. The Kandla Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) in Gujarat had only 23 firms between 1965-66, when it was set up, and 1975-76.

The list of potential investors in the new zones includes corporate heavyweights like Hindustan Lever, Southern Petro-Chemical Industries Corporation, Greaves Cotton, Shaw Wallace, Harbans Lal Malhotra and Sons, the blade king, and such well-known entities as the V.G. Panneerdas group of Madras, Tandon Electronics, Infar (India), formerly called Organon, besides many smaller companies and individuals in India and abroad.

The queue for the Madras Export Processing Zone (MEPZ) is the longest (600), it is almost as long (400) for the Falta Export Processing Zone (FEPZ) in West Bengal. The New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA), outside Delhi comes third (100) in the population sweepstakes, with Trikkara, Cochin at the bottom (40). The export proposals cover garments, electronics, engineering, leather and chemical products.

One government official attributes the relatively poor response to the Cochin zone to the absence of an export culture in Cochin, and to Kerala's militant labour. Says a MEPZ official: "Many people from the Cochin area have been talking to us about setting up units at MEPZ." More important, the Kerala Government has yet to decide on tax concessions and facilities; the Tamil Nadu Government already offers an attractive tax package. CEPZ's hopes lie abroad—a study by the Trade Development Authority had envisaged considerable non-resident Indian (NRI) investment at Cochin. Thus Kerala Industry Minister E. Ahmed recently went to the Gulf to drum up investments. Ahmed told INDIA TODAY: "I got a warm response from non-resident Malayalees and even some Arab concerns." He added that Malayalees in California's Silicon Valley had also shown interest.



In Falta's case, the state Government's determined efforts to woo industry have paid off: a five-year exemption from the crippling power cuts that plague the state, and the concessions and subsidies offered to large and medium firms (those with an investment of more than Rs 20 lakh in plant and machinery) under the West Bengal Incentive Scheme of 1983 have attracted many.

The Centre's interest in establishing the export zones has evidently been kindled by the improved performances of SEEPZ and KEPZ in recent years. SEEPZ's gross export earnings have steadily climbed from Rs 11.1 crore in 1979-80 to Rs 88.6 crore in 1983-84. In KEPZ's case, gross export earnings shot up from Rs 9.4 crore in 1979-80 to Rs 142.4 crore in 1982-83, before tumbling to Rs 10.73 crore in 1983-84. The drop was caused by the cut in Soviet orders, but they have returned as buyers this year. The establishment of more EPZ's had been proposed as early as 1976, but the Cabinet subcommittee on economic policy and coordination shot down the idea since both SEEPZ and KEPZ were then not doing very well. The proposal was dusted off the shelves after the P.L. Tandon Committee endorsed EPZ's in 1981, and received official blessing early last year.

The four new export zones exist only on paper right now. The first formality of officially clearing the project has been gone through only at Falta. Land still has to be levelled, and a Central allocation of Rs 10 crore has still to be made for Madras, Cochin and NOIDA. Without funds, the boundary walls cannot be put up, and without walls the customs can't decree that the zones are 'bonded' or exempt from import and export duties. Moreover, the Commerce Ministry's board of approvals has yet to meet and invite applications formally, though it is expected to do so sometime during this month.

While the Centre is responsible for providing the facilities within the zone, the provision of approach roads, power and water supply lies with the state governments. And water and power are vexatious questions in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Given these question marks, why is the private sector flocking to the new zones? The obvious answer is the tax and other incentives offered. EPZ establishments enjoy a five-year tax holiday, are allowed to sell 25 per cent of what they produce in the domestic market to anyone who holds a valid general currency area import licence, are exempt from import excise and other duties and are entitled to priority allotment of steel, cement and other raw materials.

The other attraction is the single-point ironing out of tiresome formalities since on-the-spot customs clearance is provided at the zone, eliminating the problems of claiming duty refunds and chasing customs officials. Still more incenti-

ves may be in the pipeline once an official committee on the subject hands in its report by the year-end.

The biggest lure, however, is the possibility of making easy profits. Since EPZ firms have to add only 30 per cent in value to the components they import, the temptation to earn a quick buck by assembling semi-knocked down (SKD) products and exporting them to assured markets in east Europe often proves irresistible. Many companies are also drawn by the prospect of obtaining more elbowroom. Tandon Electronics, for instance, already has a factory at the crowded SEEPZ and wants to enter MEPZ to make floppy discs and other electronic products. Hindustan Lever exports three million shirts a year from Kandla and wants to export three million shirts from MEPZ.

Corporate calculations clearly seem attractive. But the balance sheet from the national point of view is less so. At a total export of Rs 400 crore from the four zones, the net value earned in foreign exchange will be under Rs 150 crore. Some of this may not even be additional exports, and might merely be a transfer of existing export production to the zones in order to claim the various financial benefits on offer. Against this, the various governments involved have to lay out substantial incentives, tax write-offs and other investments. So the export zones might be a success, but their contribution to the foreign exchange kitty might well turn out to be insignificant.

— PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with bureau reports

WEST BENGAL

Distress Sale

MARXISTS offering companies for sale to the private sector? Unbelievable. However, this is not a canard spread by the capitalists but the plain, unvarnished truth. The Marxist Government of West Bengal has put up for sale nine industrial units, whose managements were taken over at various points of time in the last decade. Apparently, after sinking Rs 40 crore into them in the last seven years, the Government has decided that they are too much of a financial drag and has put the 'for sale' notices out. Says state Industry Minister Nirmal Bose: "This is a kind of compromise we are forced to make in the interest of about 8,000 employees in these units who would become jobless otherwise."

Bose also maintains that a "lot of interest is being shown from the private



Industry Minister Bose: "compromise"

sector" but enquiries revealed that the interest being shown was nothing much to write home about. No major business group has applied and ministry sources say that mostly scrap iron stalwarts have sent out feelers. Rather like a father vetting the bonafides of a prospective son-in-law, Bose asserts that "we just cannot sell to anybody. We have to be sure of the credentials and have rejected quite a few offers because of this".

Some of the units do have potential. One such is the medicine manufacturing firm of Gluconate, the only Indian importer of the powder needed for the manufacture of pethydene. The company was plagued by mismanagement and is working to a lethargic 40 per cent of capacity. Another is Lily Biscuit, which was bid for by Britannia Industries soon after the Marxists came to power in 1977; the deal was scotched by the then industry minister, George Fernandes, who objected to the sale of a government-managed unit to a foreign company.

Today, unfortunately, there are no takers for Lily Biscuit and one of the reasons why suitors were not coming forward was simply that the Government had stipulated that no buyer would be allowed to sack workers. Said a spokesman for a local chambers of commerce: "This is a bit hard on the buyer as one of the first things necessary to make a sick unit come to life is reduction of overheads."

For the state Government and the workers nationalisation would have been the most agreeable way out but this is easier said than done. In fact, of all the units whose management the Government has taken over, the Centre has agreed to the nationalisation of only four. Another way out was to form worker cooperatives to run the show; at least one unit, Ganges Printing, is already being run as a cooperative venture. But Bose admits candidly: "Workers at all units are not equally responsible."

Meanwhile, there are signs that at least one member of the Left Front is not too happy with the decision to sell — the CPI. In fact, the debate raged for an entire year, with the CPI opposing it staunchly on ideological grounds. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, however, clinched the argument by saying that "since there is no way in which we can run these any more, we will tell the jobless workers that we could not protect them because of the obstinate position taken by the CPI". But there are still no buyers — not the eligible sort anyway.

— SUMANTA SEN

THE MARKETS

Warming Up

THE STOCK-MARKET has fallen in line with the increasing evidence of an industrial uptrend, with most shares gaining ground over the last fortnight and the *Economic Times* share index picking up after a prolonged slump over three months. Fertiliser, engineering and chemical company shares have been in the limelight; and if one considers the fact that most of the stocks available on the market continue to rule at or near the lowest levels recorded this year, there is clearly room for continued gains on the market. Company news has been encouraging, the industrial production index has registered a surge, and the lagged effects of the last bumper harvest should underpin a recovery. Capital issues have similarly evoked a good response, the Tata Iron and Steel Company's debenture issue being a case in point, suggesting that there is money available with investors if good prospects are offered.

However, there are several reasons why the new bullish trend may not go too far. With the general elections now less than six months away, marketmen are bound to hedge their bets, and a mild trend till Diwali followed by a period of stagnation is on the cards. The Punjab situation continues to cause uncertainty, but in the absence of any evidence suggesting that the situation will get out of hand in the near-term future, the market sentiment is likely to be bullish. This is a time to pick up the good shares on offer, and to hold on to the attractive, prospects rather than sell just now. Mahindra & Mahindra, for instance, has a bonus issue

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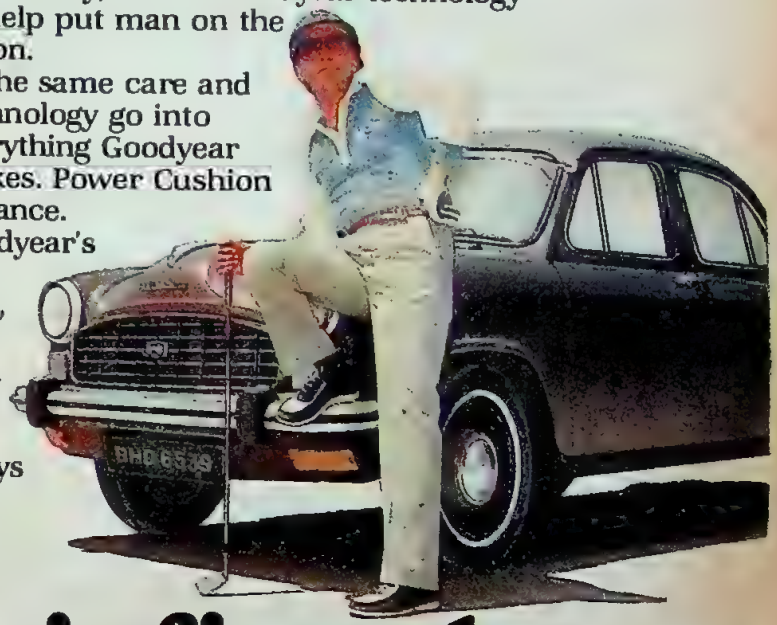
The same care and technology go into everything Goodyear makes. Power Cushion and Power Drive nylon car tyres, for instance.

Now made even better—thanks to Goodyear's world-wide Perfect Tyre Manufacturing Programme. Which works on one simple, basic principle: first class or scrap.

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it is first class"



Power-Drive

Power Cushion

*In fact, many motorists have reported as much as 50 000 km — and the tyres are still going strong.

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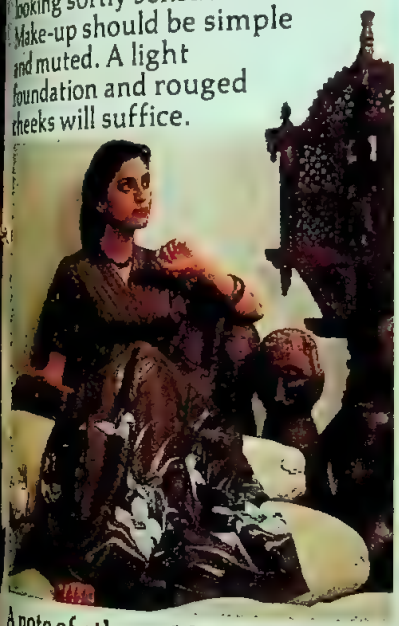


Fashions
NANDINI SEN

a natural looking make-up...



Hair left loose and adorned with flowers, frames you in a look of enchanting abandon. Festoon it with lace or ribbons if you prefer looking softly sensational. Make-up should be simple and muted. A light foundation and rouged cheeks will suffice.



A note of ethereal beauty in your dressing...

Don't let your dressing adhere to any strict lines. An informal look is called for. A churidar kameez, topped off with a graceful 'dupatta' would match your relaxed pace. The churidar kameez is a very versatile dress. Between solid shades and gay prints, you can adapt it to a number of innovative styles and give free rein to your creativity.

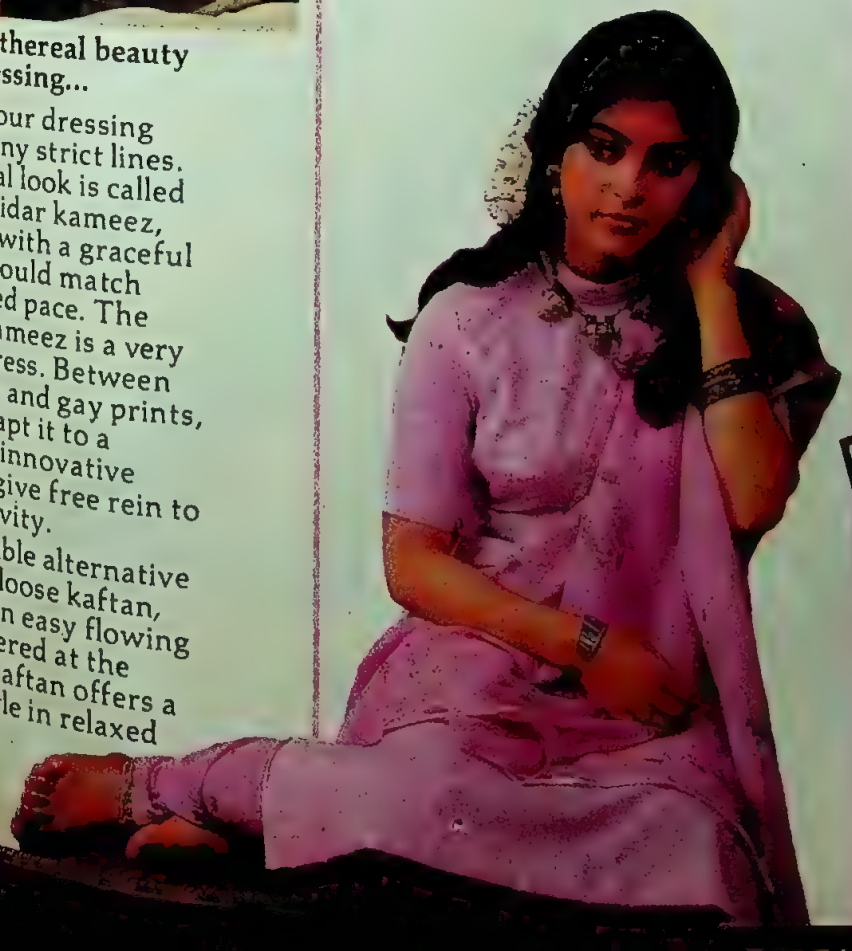
A comfortable alternative would be a loose kaftan, contoured in easy flowing lines. Gathered at the waist, the kaftan offers a willowy style in relaxed comfort.



Accessorise with a free spirit...

A touch of gaiety is called for. Silver jewellery adds an oriental lustre to your dressing. 'Payals' around your ankles make you tinkle with a nonchalant air. A short necklace with chunky pendants in fine metal, bunches sophistication with the casual. Broad bracelets and large earrings lend cheer. Encase your feet in delicate strappy sandals, to round up your carefree dressing, on a note of style.





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Vimal has created a refreshing, new range of dress material, that extends style to your natural beauty — besides wrapping you in comfort. Whether you're lounging around at home or taking to the outdoors — Vimal Supertex Dress Material has innumerable shades and designs to blend harmony into your casual moods and inclinations.



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ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.6.84	Change on fortnight
Ambalal Sarabhai	14.75	10.75	10.75	0.75 –
Apar	62.00	48.00	62.00	4.00 +
Ashok Leyland	37.50	29.50	29.50	0.25 –
Associated Cement	381.50	298.50	309.50	2.00 –
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.25	30.25	2.75 –
Ballarpur	53.30	45.50	45.50	1.00 –
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	261.00	nil
BASF	49.00	38.50	40.00	1.50 +
Bata India	48.25	33.30	36.75	0.65 –
Bharat Commerce	20.65	15.90	16.00	nil
Birla 3M	62.50	52.85	52.85	1.55 –
Birla Yte	48.50	41.00	41.00	0.50 –
Blow Plast	34.00	29.50	32.50	0.50 –
Blue Star	72.00	63.50	66.00	0.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	67.00	45.00	60.00	1.00 +
Bosch	40.50	33.60	35.00	1.40 +
Britannia Industries	38.50	34.10	36.25	0.65 +
Brooke Bond	907.50	790.00	807.50	7.50 +
Century Spinning	54.00	46.25	48.00	nil
Chloride India	30.87	26.50	28.50	0.50 +
Coates of India	114.00	100.00	114.00	1.50 +
Colgate	45.50	32.00	37.50	0.50 +
Cyanamid	76.12	47.37	52.00	0.37 –
DCM	27.50	25.25	26.10	0.10 –
Dunlop	38.00	29.00	38.00	0.75 +
East India Hotels	52.00	39.00	52.00	6.00 +
Elecon	76.00	52.75	52.81	3.31 –
Escorts	80.00	69.00	72.00	2.00 +
Food Specialities	25.00	16.00	16.75	0.50 –
Gen Carbon	23.20	20.50	20.50	0.60 –
Guest Keen Williams	57.75	49.00	53.75	0.25 –
Gwalior Rayon	25.00	20.50	22.50	1.50 +
Herdillia Chemicals	60.05	44.00	45.25	0.40 +
Hindustan Aluminium	53.00	31.00	49.50	1.50 –
Hindustan Cocoa	58.50	46.00	47.50	nil
Hindustan Lever	44.25	40.40	44.25	1.61 +
Hindustan Motors	24.80	19.00	19.00	0.40 –
Indian Aluminium	24.10	20.40	22.50	0.10 +
Indian Cable	28 00	25.00	26.60	1.20 +
Indian Explosives	37.50	31.00	37.50	3.00 +
Ind'l Organic	38.25	33.00	33.00	2.40 –
Indian Oxygen	76.50	64.50	67.50	0.50 +
Indian Rayon	47.60	39.50	39.50	0.60 –
J.K. Synthetics	94.00	42.00	42.00	1.00 –
Kelvinator	61.60	47.50	47.50	0.50 –
Kesoram Cotton	137.00	113.00	132.00	5.00 –
Kheric Engineering	462.50	407.50	462.50	7.50 +
Kirloskar Cummins	26.50	22.00	25.20	0.70 +
Kothari (Madras)	79.50	65.00	72.00	1.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	33.80	24.50	27.90	1.20 +
Lipton	70.00	52.00	70.00	3.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	31.00	20.00	21.75	1.50 +
Mangalam Cement	30.31	24.50	28.00	0.38 +
Modi Rubber	262.50	212.50	213.75	1.25 +
Motor Industries	208.25	176.50	182.50	3.75 +
National Organic	37.00	32.00	35.50	0.25 –
Nicon	69.00	54.00	63.00	7.00 +
Otis Elevator	283.00	246.00	279.00	7.50 +
Premier Automobile	55.00	41.00	47.00	4.50 +
Ranbaxy	123.00	110.00	112.00	2.00 –
Reliance	71.50	56.00	62.00	3.00 +
Rolls-Royce Hindustan	34.50	30.47	33.50	0.38 +
Shriram Fibres	47.50	43.00	43.25	0.25 +
Siemens	33.90	28.06	33.90	2.28 +
SPIC	57.00	43.50	43.50	0.25 –
Sriram Products	60.50	53.25	60.50	7.25 +
Tata Chemicals	268.00	245.50	265.00	2.50 +
Tata Steel	428.00	398.00	408.00	nil
Telco	68.40	50.85	57.2	5.80
Tennaco	28.90	24.80	25.8	0.8 +
Union Carbide	22.50	19.50	21.50	1.25 +
Usha Martin Black	395.00	335.00	341.00	1.00 +
Voltas	43.50	28.50	32.50	2.50 –
Wyeth	49.00	32.00	32.00	2.00 –
Zenith Century Leasing	14.35	13.65		
Unit Trust				



waiting for government approval and should prove to be a sound proposition even if it is already ruling at the year's peak levels.

The non-convertible portion of convertible debentures remain the best prospect on the market since a number of companies are almost certain to follow the Reliance lead of converting this debt into equity. Reliance itself has improved on its original conversion ratio, while Ranbaxy debentures have gained close to 10 per cent in less than a month. Others could perform equally well.

DCM and Escorts shares remain the big question mark, their fate hanging on the prospects of a settlement being reached between the company managements and Swraj Paul. Both companies shares are currently over-valued, especially DCM's, but a favourable settlement could send them on a quick spurt before things settle down.

Meanwhile, the boom in tea continues because of favourable prices, jute faces some uncertainty following warnings of a raw jute shortage, and the crisis in textiles was emphasised once again with the decision by two mills in Gujarat to down their shutters. But many engineering companies are going through a better spell than before, and something like Larsen & Toubro should be a good buy.

Also, some of the corporate entities who have been perennially complaining of difficult market conditions — the tyre industry, for instance — have nevertheless returned reasonably good results, belying much of the previous pessimism. In contrast, there is some evidence to suggest that the long-awaited shake-out in leasing has begun. If this gathers momentum, a number of new issues that are planned could come croppers, while those already quoted on the stock exchanges will lose in value. Twentieth Century Leasing, for instance, is now ruling at its lowest level in the year, and still falling.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES

June 8, 1984

	LATEST	Change on month
ET Commodity Price Index*	299.7	7.4 +
Chemicals	343.2	0.2 +
Industrial Fibres	218.0	4.0 +
Metals	394.9	2.4 +
Gold, standard		
Rs per 10 gm	1920.00	52.0 –
Silver, .999		
Rs per kg	3430.00	70.0 –

SHARES

June 18, 1984

ET Share Price Index*	261.8	5.1 +
Cement	189.0	0.2 +
Chemicals	227.4	9.9 +
Engineering	448.6	10.9 +
Fertilisers	258.0	16.1 +
Paper	551.6	2.8 +
Rubber Goods	184.4	10.2 +

MONEY

June 1, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.5%	nil
Call Money Rate, Bombay	–	–
Money Supply	1.8%	
Bank Deposits	1.5%	
Foreign Exchange Assets	9.6% –	

*Index — 1969-70 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.7855	9.6584
Austria	Schilling	100	58.0170	57.3494
Bahrain	Dinar	1	29.1920	28.9895
Bangladesh	Taka	100	43.9341	43.6294
Canada	Dollar	1	8.6276	8.5509
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1070	1.09437
Egypt	Pound	1	13.2542	13.1622
France	Franc	1	1.3198	1.3060
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.4408	1.4262
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.0901	1.0825
Iran	Rial	100	12.8091	12.4228
Italy	Lira	100	0.6560	0.6500
Japan	Yen	100	4.7978	4.7456
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7828	0.7789
Kuwait	Dinar	1	37.0069	36.8090
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8708	4.8189
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8379	0.8321
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6824	0.6777
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5969	3.5574
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8007	0.7952
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.3268	5.2705
Spain	Peseta	100	7.2855	7.1431
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4375	0.4365
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3798	1.3642
Switzerland	France	1	4.8725	4.8200
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.8812	0.8760
Thailand	Baht	100	48.1129	47.7028
UK	Pound	1	15.3339	15.1976
USA	Dollar	1	11.2350	11.1425
UAE	Dihram	1	2.9950	2.9473
USSR	Rouble	1	13.8508	13.7547
W Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0474	4.0041

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 23 June 1984.

MADHYA PRADESH

The Lessons of Change

THE VILLAGE schoolchildren squat around objects that are everyday enough—sugar crystals, some particles of salt, veins of leaves, a printed page—but their excitement transforms these into things of magic. With the help of an old de-filamented light bulb filled with water, they are going to take their first look at a micro-world they never dreamed existed. As the makeshift microscope magnifies their little store of objects in turn, the excitement—and noise—increases. But no censorious teacher comes along to hush them up, because they are part of a unique science programme—the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) which has, unusually enough, made science fun for nearly 40,000 middle school students in Madhya Pradesh. And they got the idea for the wonderful microscope in the very first chapter of their class six science workbook, which bears the tantalising title: "Assorted Games".

The message that learning can involve thinking is being spread in 255 middle schools in Hoshangabad district, and in selected schools in Ujjain and Dewas as well. This year, more schools in Ratlam, Shajapur and Mandsaur districts will join up. What is sweeping the educational system in Madhya Pradesh is something of a revolution because it upsets the basic unspoken rules of the establishment. One significant trait of the HSTP is its stress on methodology—the scientific manner of arriving at a conclusion following an experiment is as important as the conclusion itself—and its insistence that students must learn the basics themselves in the truest sense, and take nothing for granted.

The teacher is expected to only guide the students from among whom the answer should emerge. Moreover, in the usual system, children are first made to cram established principles or laws and then conduct experiments to prove these. In the HSTP, experiments and observations come first, and out of it, principles of science are expected to be revealed. Indeed, the larger the number of questions from students, the more successful are the lessons considered to be.

But debates instead of cramming can sometimes lead to a very akward situation. For the teachers, who themselves are not very well educated replying to a burst of questions can at times be difficult business. Worse, there are no "answers" in the HSTP textbooks. And admitting any kind of ignorance to one's students would be an unthinkable loss of face. State Education Secretary Ashok Vajpayee explains: "Traditionally, students have played the role of a vulnerable and captive audience with the teacher appearing as the all-knowing—and hopefully benevolent—despot."

Many teachers do not like this change of role from that of a fountainhead of knowledge to that of a mere guide. However, the new system certainly offers plenty for people on both sides of the teacher's table. As Bharat Poorey, assistant professor of a college in Dhar who is now closely associated with the project, points out: "Many teachers, also victims of the traditional system, know all the bookish facts but are very unclear on their fundamentals."

What is sweeping the educational system in Madhya Pradesh is something of a revolution because it upsets the basic unspoken rules of the establishment.

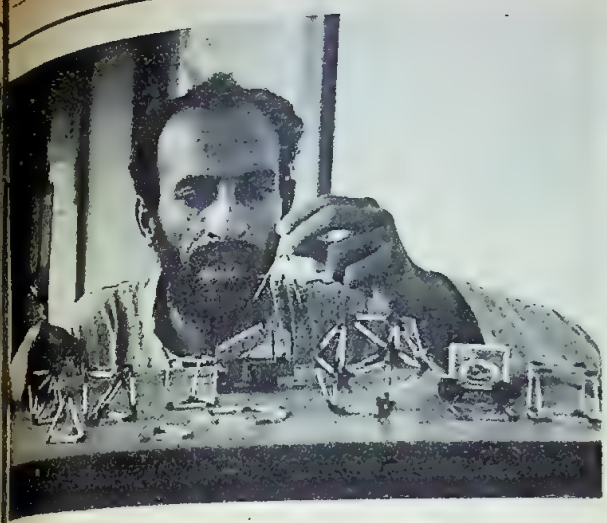
The idea of such a programme was born casually enough in the course of a conversation between two people in 1972. Sudarshan Kapur is an alumnus of the London School of Economics, and in 1968, he had taken charge of the Gandhian institution, Friends Rural Centre (FRC) in Rasulia near Hoshangabad. Anil Sadgopal is a doctorate in biochemistry and molecular biology from the California Institute of Technology who was also in Hoshangabad trying to set up a rural-based voluntary organisation, Kishore Bharati. One evening, during a walk, they got talking about a middle school run by FRC. Kapur was worried because what started off as a pioneering project based on Gandhiji's concept of *Nai Talee* (new education) was now, as he saw it, not much more than a good private school. Sadgopal told him about the efforts of Doon School teachers B.G. Pitre and Chandrakant Dikshit who had put together a book that taught physics through experiments. It had even been introduced in four middle schools run by the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Unfortunately, though, the effort died out due to a disagreement about examinations.

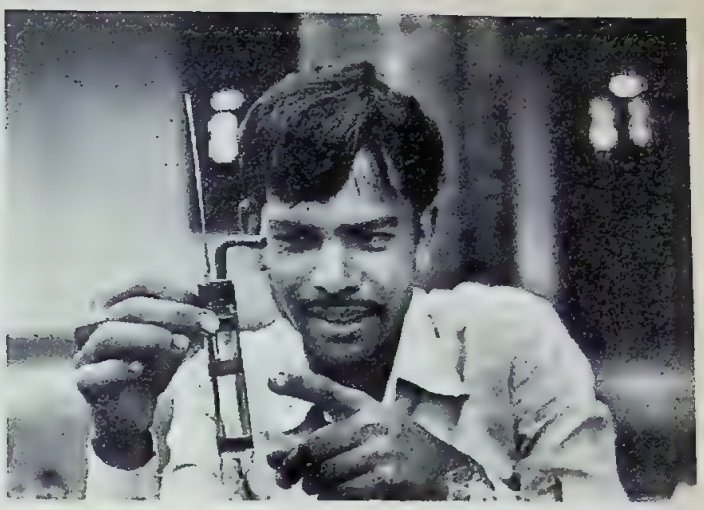
But Kapur was enthusiastic—the concept just might work here—and got in touch with Pitre, Dikshit and two more senior scientists who had supported that early effort. They were Professor Yash Pal, now advisor to the Planning Commission and Professor V.G. Kulkarni. All four were invited over to discuss the idea, and it was decided Sadgopal with his science background, would be involved in the project. And, more important in the light of the Bombay experience, they would require complete freedom from the Government in instituting the project.

Soon after, Kapur, Sadgopal and another FRC worker went across to Bhopal to seek the Government's permission to introduce the programme in 15 Hoshangabad schools. Their meeting with the then director of public instruction, B.D. Sharma, was met-



Students of the HSTP course in Madhya Pradesh







Gupta (top left) Chauhan (top right) and Anil Sadgopal: a fresh approach to teaching

ly brief. "We were very naïve then," recall's Sadgopal. "We assumed that his saying 'yes' was the most natural thing in the world." Predictably, someone tried to put a spoke in the wheel: a senior officer of the directorate strongly questioned FRC's credentials in handling the scheme and suggested that Sharma withdraw his permission. Sharma's reply was classic: "The standard of science education in Madhya Pradesh is so poor, what can these people do to make it worse?" In the bargain, the district education officer insisted that another school be added to the scheme, making the total 16.

FOR THE next three years, programme workers discovered the challenges of relating science to a rural environment. New books had to be written and simple experiments devised. But unexpected problems kept cropping up. The village child simply did not understand concepts that are so commonplace in the cities. For instance, a documentary on the fertilisation in a flower became incomprehensible to the little rural viewer. This was simply because arrows were used in the film to indicate the course of the process, but the villagers just couldn't understand what an arrow was doing in a flower.

Programme workers thus learned a valuable lesson: scientists and academicians, however good, cannot write books entirely comprehensible to rural students as long as they sit in isolation in the city. But the lesson was well learned, anyway: Kamal Mahendru, one of the young volunteers spent several days among the villagers to understand their concept of voltage. Chapter after chapter of the books were worked out that way. The result: a unique package made immediately relevant to the students it was meant for.

To allow for adaptations that would make the books absolutely bug-free, they were first cyclostyled and later remade into a series of cards. Thus, alterations were accommodated whenever actual experience in the field made them necessary. Tirelessly, the scientists continued to mould their textbooks to suit their readers' understanding, rewriting many portions as many as a dozen times over the first few years.

In 1975, the education establishment in the state got a bit of a jolt when the first batch of HSTP students had to sit for the class eight board examination. The director of public instruction that year, Nirmala Buch, did the unthinkable: she allowed FRC and Kishore Bharati to conduct the examinations in the 16 schools where students had taken part in this scheme. The students appeared under the open book system, but what was more shocking to those outside was that voluntary organisations had actually been allowed to set papers, conduct examinations and even evaluate the answer sheets—an unprecedented event.

Until 1978, FRC and Kishore Bharati continued to directly run the programme and finance it as well. But that year, Ashok Vajpayee became the director of public instruction, and HSTP got a boost when it was extended to cover all schools in the entire district of Hoshangabad. The Government also took on the responsibility of running it. Then the next year, FRC dissociated itself with the programme, and it became apparent to Kishore Bharati workers that some other organisation would have to take over what had burgeoned into a very large programme. Thus Eklavya—named after the legendary Bhil archer of the Mahabharata—was formed with the objective of spreading "the method of self-discovery and inquiry in the field of education".

Eklavya was registered only in 1982. But earlier that year, a meeting between Central and state officials called by the Planning Commission decided that a core budget of Rs 29 lakh would be made available to the organisation, for a period of three years. Eklavya was to be responsible, but Kishore Bharati workers continued to help. The programme got another shot in the arm when the University Grants Commission decided to permit college teachers to participate in it for up to three years. Their salaries and seniorities were protected during the period they were involved in the HSTP.

The decision proved effective. Through the years, college teachers have been pouring in to help, all of them bound by the belief that a change in education is inevitable. Manmohan Kapoor, a reader in Delhi University's chemistry department, is a veteran HSTP enthusiast. For the past 11 years, he has given up his holidays to train HSTP teachers. He says firmly: "Let alone schools, even in prominent universities, the priorities are all wrong. The yardstick of success is the number of research papers published, the number of Ph.D. students one has. Being a good teacher is now secondary." Kapoor makes it a point to come over every year, because

he says a change at the lower level is most crucial.

It is part of the success of the scheme that the science kits which are provided in the course are simple and cheap. "It gives lie to the belief that the experimental method is not practicable for a poor country," says Vinod Raina, a former computer consultant with the Delhi University, and now a key figure in Eklavya. He says the cost of kits—one for every four students—for a middle school with 120 students, would work out to Rs 1,000. And for all middle schools in the state, it would be just a little over Rs 1 crore—about 0.5 per cent of the state's annual education budget.

Some teachers, however, complain of ineffectual kit replenishment and delays. But Sadgopal points out that nearly two-thirds of the course which is spread over three years does not even rely on the kit. He says teachers can easily manage without some parts of the kit for the time it takes to replace them. But either to supplement the kit or take off from where it quits, others have come up with very interesting innovations. For instance, Arvind Gupta, a former Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) student, has put together a kit of his own to demonstrate geometric shapes to children. It uses cycle valve tubes joined to matchsticks, and cheap plastic bangles to show the flow of motion. Thorns of the babul tree do for a divider, buttons and clips help illustrate a chapter of pulleys. He says: "It helps children get a feel of things."

Umesh Chauhan does not have a prestigious IIT background. In fact, this middle school teacher has only studied up to matriculation. But he has made significant contributions to the textbooks as well developed simpler experiments. To demonstrate to his charges how a pump functions, he made a mini prototype out of a broken boiling tube, a cycle spoke and three rubber corks. He has also made a fairly powerful microscope using a bamboo and wood structure, the cap of a discarded Vicks can for a reflector, a used-ball pen refill, a rubber cap and a fused torch bulb filled with water as a lens. A happy Chauhan says: "Before this programme, I never saw an important role for myself, because of my limited education. But now my confidence in myself has increased tremendously."

Though teachers like Chauhan have



SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

Though some teachers have been completely won over to the HSTP cause, critics of the programme abound.

been completely won over to the HSTP cause, critics of the programme abound. Some teachers are downright antagonistic and many merely indifferent. Brought up in the traditional mould themselves, they find it difficult to appreciate what they consider pointless debates which arise out of the method of the course. Under the old system, a lesson could be taught much quicker and easier with the dictation of notes, and learning by rote. The new programme also means more work, visits to the field, and disturbing classroom phenomena like children talking instead of sitting quietly in their seats.

MORE serious is the difficulty of the children who complete the programme. Once they are through middle school, they have to return to the traditional system in class nine, and for most of them, the experience is a bit of a shock. The mother of a teenaged student in a Hoshangabad school says: "It was difficult for her to believe that what was taught in the eighth and ninth were both science, so great was the difference." R.N. Katare, the official overlooking the HSTP in the district, admits ruefully: "Because of the return to the old system, the effect of the programme is unfortunately diluted."

Some principals resent the commotion which inevitably follows the excitement of children learning for themselves, and the comparative freedom under the new dispensation. In urban areas, there are complaints of t many students per class the rural areas of too room to even keep the b And cynics say smugly teachers don't teach a way, so the HSTP will ha make any difference. Education Secretary, payee argues: "Ev complains about the vance of the usual patter education. Here we have alternative model, not ported, but developed locally"—a plea for po ve thinking.

Vajpayee says some educationists deprecate the gramme, probably because they look as an intrusion into their own field work. Even otherwise, the human factor serves sometimes to negate strengths of the programme. For ins ce, the elaborate scheme of follow- self-criticism and reassessment is som mes short-circuited because of the edu tion hierarchy: when a higher seconda schoolteacher comes to a middle sch to help solve an academic problem, tends to behave rather more like a se

Another problem confronting programme is bureaucratic laziness. Government continues to rely heavi Eklavya, a fact that Vajpayee admits instance, if a book is out of print or are not supplied, it is usually a Ekla worker who contacts Bhopal to sort the problem. Sadgopal says: "Individ within the Government have helped but the Government as a whole has b more inclined to maintain status quo." fact, the Government is yet to evalu the programme, although demands h been made often enough. In late 1982, director of public instruction did co tute an evaluation committee, which for the first time a year later, absolu unclear about what it was supposed to doing.

Today Eklavya is faced with th options: to expand geographically science; or vertically into higher lower levels of science in school; or ho zontally in middle school into other jects. The options are still being te Despite all the criticism about the gramme, it is undeniably a good bet. paraphrase B.D. Sharma's laconic c ment, considering the rot in the state cation system, there is absolutely noth to lose with the HSTP programme and haps, much to be gained.

—SREEKANT KHANDE

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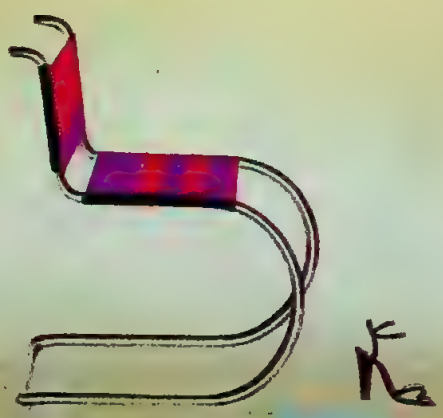
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MAHARASHTRA

Trimming the Fat

IT IS a quiet revolution, but one which promises to change the face of Maharashtra's administration. Spearheaded by Chief Secretary R.D. Pradhan and a young team of officials at the newly set up Maharashtra Institute of Development Administration (MIDA) in the state's Raj Bhavan complex, it is the start of a massive state-wide shake-up. Its ambitious aims are to streamline district-level and grassroots administration, alter the functioning of the Government officials radically to make them accessible to the common man and increase efficiency in government departments with an enormous thrust at clearing work backlogs and improved record-keeping. Formally inaugurated by Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil on June 1, MIDA and the sweeping administrative reforms launched simultaneously in the state represent the most ambitious attempt since Independence at replacing the British colonial services with a system more suited to India's development plans.

Apart from administrative reforms, which it will plan and coordinate with a high-level committee of secretaries at Bombay, the institute has several other plans. It aims at training civil servants in the complex business of rural development, creating a forum for officials, bankers, industrialists and elected representatives to interact, and working out more effective ways of implementing developmental plans. Said Pradhan, who is also director of MIDA: "It has become clear that with the kind of developmental efforts taking place in the country we have to have greater interaction between cooperatives, banks, administrators and anybody else with a background which can help. At the same time the Government decided that we have to rapidly tone up the administration right from Mantralaya down to the patwari at the grassroots."

Already six districts in the state have followed the pathbreaking example of Ahmednagar, which first sparked off interest in major administrative reforms with its far-reaching experiments in 1982 and 1983 to bring about a "people-oriented administration". Working on a crash programme which started last April, the six will by year-end be replicas of what the Government has proudly dubbed the "Ahmednagar model". By end 1984, another eight districts will be launched on the same path, and within three years the state Government hopes to revamp every collectorate, tehsil office and village-level patwari in Maharashtra.

In Bombay's Mantralaya, which houses ministries and most government departments, the move is already well on its way: a massive six-week drive early this year resulted in widespread cleaning-up operations and disposal of backlogs. More than 200 tonnes of redundant files were destroyed, record rooms were completely updated, indexed and catalogued for instant retrieval of files and masses of extra furniture were scrapped.

The effort is based almost entirely on the incredible example of former Ahmednagar collector Anil Kumar Lakhina, who in a nine-month campaign in 1982 embarked on a huge operation to clean up and reorganise the 166-year-old collectorate, Maharashtra's oldest. Volunteers from the collectorate staff worked daily 14-hour stints to process over two lakh files, and when the clean-up drew to a close, 10 truckloads of shredded files and papers had been cleared out of the offices. Said Lakhina: "This meant that a 100-tonne load of paper was off everybody's mind, and it was that paper which was causing confusion and creating a total lack of accessibility."

But the file clearance was only the beginning of Lakhina's inspired effort. It was accompanied by a systematic drive to modernise record-keeping methods and filing procedures, and create a pleasant work environment for clerks and officials. Roping in outside advisers from Bombay's J.J. School of Arts and the local Kale-Kutha Design Consultants for help in floor-space planning and office layouts, as well as the faculty of the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad for efficient managerial methods, the dymanic young collector expanded his reorganisation experiment so as to include every aspect of the collectorate's working.

To visitors who saw it before or during the first phase of reorganisation, the Ahmednagar collectorate is unrecognisable today. Impeccably clean offices are laid out on a "work-flow" pattern in orderly rows of standardised tables and chairs. Conspicuously absent are the steel "almirahs" topped with dusty files which clutter up practically every government office in the country. Lakhina argues that the "mystery" created by sealed cupboards is part of the colonial heritage, a means of protecting the interests of an absentee government which has no place in today's India other than for classified information.

Most impressive has been the transformation of the record-room into a hyper-efficient information retrieval area where files dating back to the turn of the century can be located in moments. Lakhina's volunteers designed a colour-code for classifying files according to the statutory period they have to be preserved for, and a simple library card-catalogue lists every file on the 15-foot-high shelves which line the room.

Lakhina: successful experiment



CHANDEEP UDAY SINGH



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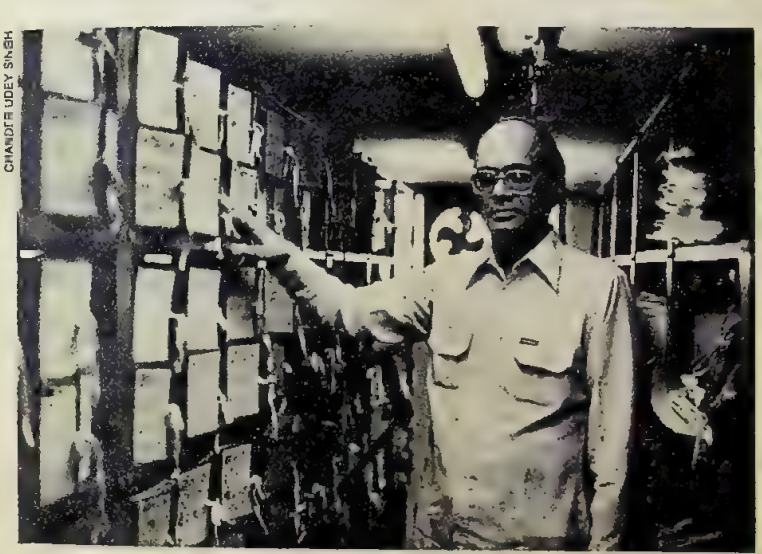
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Demonstrating the speed of the system in June last year, the records clerk located a 1,937 file picked at random from the catalogue in 73 seconds. By May this year, he had clipped his retrieval time down to 45 seconds or less.

More important even than the cosmetic changes and retrieval systems are the new concepts in office procedures and functioning which Lakhina devised to make the administration accessible to the people. Although he was initially inspired to start the house-cleaning operations after seeing Satara Collector V.P. Raja's efforts in that direction, Lakhina's experiment in Ahmednagar went much further. Starting with a surprisingly perceptive analysis of the reasons for people's lack of faith in the system, he implemented a series of practical measures to create a more "people-oriented" administration. Lakhina explained: "A total lack of faith between the office and the public prevailed, and touts bridged this gap to their own advantage. People never came close to the office because they were insecure, and the clerks, equally insecure in dealing with touts who often have political connections, sought their own security by working as a pack."



CHANDER UDEY SINGH

Chary with filing system: timely shake-up

THE COLLECTOR's solutions were amazingly simple. To reduce the need for visits by MLA's, political workers and others who tend to take up so much of the officials' time, registers to note their grievances and problems were made. Regular follow-up reports are now sent out to inform the applicants of the progress of their cases, and visits by politicians have dropped off sharply, as a consequence. For the public, he introduced a series of pamphlets in colloquial Marathi, explaining the requirements and procedures for various licences, applications for state assistance, drought relief and the like, in a bid to "demystify" the Government's operations so that common men gained confidence in it.

People-orientation was extended even further where routine demands like the grant of licences was concerned. Today, the Ahmednagar collectorate operates a bank-teller system for the issue of ration cards, fair price shop licences, arms licences and the like. Applicants are given pamphlets detailing requirements and forms to be filled. When they complete the forms, they get tokens which indicate how long it will take to process their applications. After that period of waiting —an hour for a ration card, a week for a gun licence —they are either given the licence, or a printed bank-like note with the reasons for refusal ticked off.

A detailed survey last year by a high-powered committee of secretaries of government heartily lauded the results of the Ahmednagar experiment. They found that public dealing had significantly improved, the movement of files was far quicker now, and even the handling of the complicated development directives from Mantralaya was "far more expeditious than the past". Said Pradhan: "There is clear evidence of a qualitative and quantitative improvement in the work of the collectorate, but ultimately much will depend on how well we can transmit these benefits to subordinate offices and superior offices right up to the Mantralaya."

Today Lakhina's experiment has progressed even further on the road to really dynamic and responsive administration. Continuing with his innovations till the end of May this year when he was appointed additional director to the proposed Institute for Development Administration, he had introduced further refinements to the system. These included information cards on every village in the district, detailing important facts about facilities, amenities, past development and poverty upliftment programmes to ensure instant recall of information. He also pioneered an inventory system which makes it possible for any clerk to instantly identify the documents in his possession and their stage of disposal.

As Venkat Chary, Secretary, General Administration says: "Lakhina has proved that good ideas do not necessarily flow from the top. There is no doubt that it is entirely because of his example that we have taken up the massive task of revamping the state administration."

Lakhina borrowed the idea of constant experimentation and the quality circle from the Japanese. This enables clerks themselves to contribute to the generation of improvements. For instance, the six-bundle filing system Lakhina had introduced throughout the collectorate to standardise clerical procedures has been further simplified and replaced with a four-bundle system, and in the treasury office, with a two-bundle system. Village information cards are being compiled into registers which will be given to every MLA so that he can identify the real problems of his constituency and avoid wasting time on repetitious requests.

The Ahmednagar experiment has today become a model for other states as well. Almost every day last month, the collectorate played host to delegations from across the country who came to study Lakhina's administrative reforms. Gujarat is replicating the model in Baroda district, Kerala in Trivandrum and Quilon, Madhya Pradesh in Khandwa and Uttar Pradesh in Basti. Others are planning to hop on the bandwagon as well, and by year- end, most states will have launched pilot projects similar to the Ahmednagar model.

At MIDA, meanwhile, the architect of the reforms has thrown himself enthusiastically into his new role as faculty member and conceptualiser. On the first day of the institute's formal existence, he kicked off with a seminar on methods of grouping integrated rural development projects (IRDP) beneficiaries into economically viable units which will sustain efforts to alleviate poverty. Essentially biased towards rural development and breaking with the civil service tradition of relegating less vocal villagers to the background, the institute will have its work cut out for it in creating an effective training ground for future bureaucrats and others connected with the development process. But the belated change from colonial priorities to national is both essential and long overdue.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Slave Trade

WHEN Jehan Ara, 15, a labourer's daughter from Samastipur in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, was sweet-talked into going for a holiday in Kashmir by Mustafa some five months ago, she had little idea that it was to be the beginning of a nightmare journey. Mustafa, a local pimp, took her to Gond Ibrahim village, some 25 km north of Srinagar where she was handed over to Abdullah Giani. Giani, in turn, sold her to a 20-year-old Kashmiri, Ibrahim Dar, for Rs 1,600. Ignoring her protests and pleas, she was hustled into marriage with Dar and then forced to succumb to humiliating sex with his brothers and various villagers. "At first, I refused to succumb but I was beaten up severely and they threatened to kill me. I had no choice but to give in," she says.



(From left) Jehan Ara, Saimoona and Zahida: flesh trade victims

Saimoona, 18, has a similar story to relate. The daughter of a beggar in Murshidabad, she was also sold along with her seven-year-old daughter to procurers for Rs 500 and found herself in Gond Ibrahim in the hands of Giani, the area's principal supplier of girls. She was "married" to Ishaq Dar, 50, the father of nine children. In her own words, she is nothing but a slave in the Dar household. "Both me and my daughter work in the paddy fields all day and then are forced to do hard labour in the house after dark." She has been threatened with the rape of her daughter if she attempts to escape.

Tragically, these are just two examples of the horror stories that started surfacing last fortnight in Gond Ibrahim and three adjacent villages. Initial investigations reveal that only the tip of the proverbial iceberg has been unearthed in what is a long-standing and flourishing racket in slave trade from the northern parts of West Bengal to Kashmir.

Ironically enough, the Kash police were forced to take action afte local newspaper carried a story about scandal. The crime branch, in a bel move, managed to rescue three girls fro their inhuman bondage but indicatio are that there are over 200 such you girls, mostly in their teens, who have be sold into slavery. Originally from po Bihari Muslim families who migrat West Bengal in the wake of the 19 gladesh war, the illiterate girls are lure Kashmir with the promise of em ployment. Once in Kashmir, they are e tually abducted, forced into marria with aged or disabled Kashmiri villag and then sold numerous times for use sex objects or household slaves for le The rates for each girl vary between 1,000 and Rs 5,000 depending on age a physical attributes.

However, police action so far h yielded little results. Cases have been gistered against 11 peop eight Kashmiris and th Bengalis, involved in the ra ket, but all of them are u untraceable. Even the loc involved in the area, wh covers barely a 10 sq k area, are still to be apprehe ded. Says Azhar Noma deputy inspector general police who is in charge of investigations: "It will take some ti locate all the girls. We will have to e ne them individually before charge-sh ting the accused in a court of law."

The third girl rescued by the police Zahida, 17, also from Murshidabad w was sold to a barber Talib Hajjam, for 1,300. The indignities she was subjec to must have been inhuman since she fuses to speak about them though h tears are eloquent enough indication

Meanwhile, the scandal has arous considerable indignation in the valle Nasima Akhtar, president of the Kas mir Council of the National Federati of Indian Women, has filed a writ petitio alleging police complicity in the flo trade. Acting on this, Justice M.L. Bha of the Jammu & Kashmir High Cour asked the chief judicial magistrate, Sri gar, to submit a detailed report after i vestigating the scandal. Chief Minist Farooq Abdullah has also instructed th crime branch of the police to thoroughly probe the "disgraceful matter". But sinc the police only managed to unearth th girls and none of the local culprits inv ved, it could be a long time before the r extent of the racket sees the light of da

—GHULAM NABI KHAN

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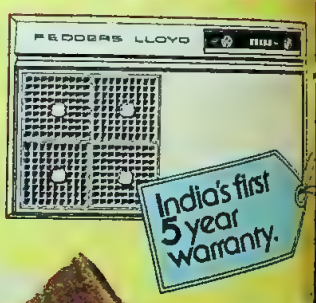
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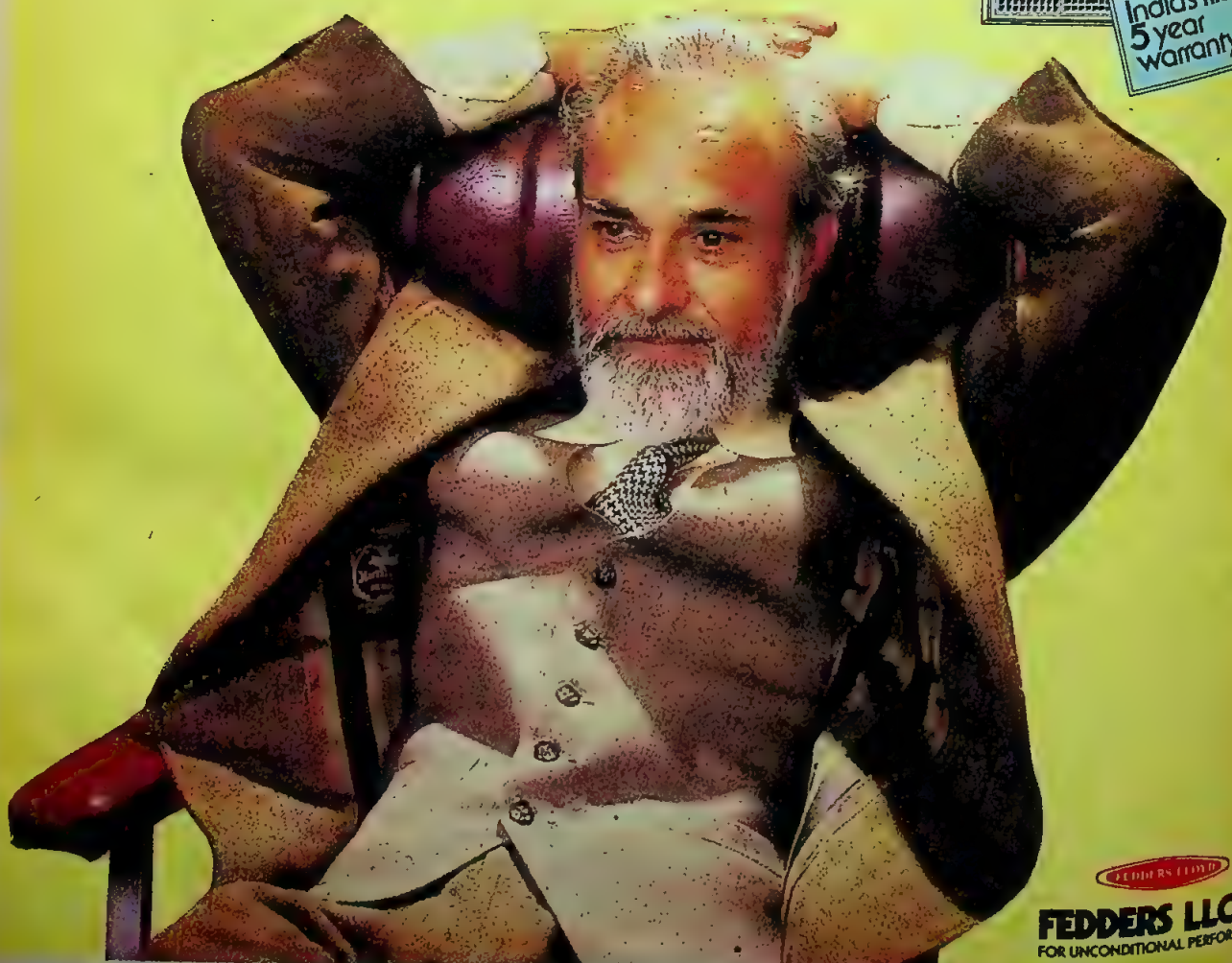
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BIHAR

Kidnappers' Kingdom

FATHER Thomas Chakalakal, a 56-year-old Jesuit priest from Kerala, was taking his evening bath after a hard day's work with the tribals of West Champaran district in Bihar. Suddenly a gang of fierce looking men burst into his Seva Sadan in Ratnapurwa village and demanded Rs 2 lakh from the surprised priest. When Chakalakal could not give them the money they asked for the gang members grabbed a radio and tape-recorder which were in the house as well as Rs 5,000 and with the priest in tow absconded into the surrounding jungles. It was 7.30 p.m. on May 31, 1984.

Exactly half an hour later, the same gang struck again. This time they went into nearby Laxmipur village and entered the house of farmer Ganga Vishun Tiwary, 60. From him they demanded Rs 10,000 as ransom and threatened to shoot any of his family who resisted. Finally, Tiwary too was taken into the jungles to join the gang's other captive, Father Chakalakal.

The reaction to Chakalakal's kidnapping was swift. Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran made a special request to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to help recover the priest and the prime minister asked the Bihar Government to find the priest unharmed. The embarrassed state Government immediately dispatched its top crime detection officials to the district to head a special task force which combed the jungles. The police drew a blank in the face of the difficult terrain, but the criminals let Chakalakal go after three days in captivity. Tiwary was released on his promise to pay Rs 7,000 as soon as he could.

The abductions of Chakalakal and Tiwary almost simultaneously were not isolated incidents but part of a flourishing kidnapping industry which brings quick money to criminals without too much blood-letting or police action. Conservative estimates are that since late 1981, 131 persons have been kidnapped. But the local people say more than 250 people had been abducted and ransom paid to their captors.

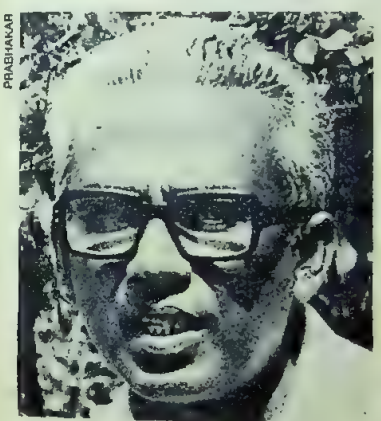
The criminals' job is made easier by the fact that in the majority of cases the victims prefer to do without informing the police. Says district Police Superintendent Bhagwat Prasad: "By abducting people the criminals get big money easily but this is never divulged to the police. It remains a secret between the kidnapped and the kidnappers." Most of the victims are not interested in detecting the culprit but only in getting themselves or their dear ones rescued. Adds Inspector General of Police (IGP) S.N. Roy: "They are not talking and the police are doing the job alone."

But most victims feel they have reason to remain silent and avoid going to the police. On January 30 this year Gopi Krishna Mishra was abducted from his farm at Madanpur near Bagaha. There were some policemen nearby who instead of helping the victim returned to the police station. Gopi Krishna's father Radhe Krishna Mishra negotiated with the kidnappers, paid Rs 10,000 and got his son back unharmed. "I did not go to the police for help as people have lost faith in the administration," he said.

With the lack of faith in the local administration on the one hand and the impression among the people that the gangs are running a parallel government on the other it is not surprising that fear and panic have gripped the entire district. Says a very shaken Birendra Tiwary, brother of the kidnapped Ganga Vishun Tiwary: "There is total terror. We have stopped coming out of our houses after sundown. We live under constant fear." Three years ago when refusing bail to a criminal Sessions Judge P.N. Singh had observed: "There appears to be a parallel government run by dacoits in the locality. Their dictates are seldom disobeyed for fear of reprisals."

Says Saryu Prasad, the additional public prosecutor who was kidnapped from Siswan-Sarayan village near Bettiah and paid Rs 15,000 as ransom before he was freed: "I could not get any protection from the administration," and adds, "if total cases are taken together the criminals have by now earned Rs 4 crore from kidnappings — an annual turnover of Rs 1.5 lakh."

Officials in Patna and Bettiah, the district headquarters, do not dispute the figures. They admit that kidnapping here has grown into a well organised business. The criminals have also begun to diversify by fixing tolls on the villagers, lifting cattle and even stealing tractors for ransom. So secure are they that sometimes they just send letters demanding cash or grain. Recalls Ramesh Pandey, a farmer and social worker: "Recently I received a letter for Rs 50,000 in cash, five bags of fine rice and five goats. I handed over the letter to the police and stopped going to



PRABHAKAR

Father Thomas Chakalakal



K.M. KISHAN

Ganga Vishun Tiwary

The abductions of Chakalakal and Tiwary were not isolated incidents but part of a flourishing kidnapping industry which brings quick money without blood-letting or police action.



"I did not go to the police for help as people have lost faith in the administration."

—RADHE KRISHNA MISHRA, father of kidnap victim





"If total cases are taken together, the criminals have by now earned Rs 4 crore from kidnapping."

—SARYU PRASAD, additional public prosecutor and kidnap victim

my farm." Pandey is not the only farmer to desert his fields to avoid kidnapping. "Most of the fields have been left barren for the past two years and soon people will stop using their land," says Radhe Krishna Mishra.

Most of the victims of the kidnappers have been middle class farmers, neo-rich businessmen and sometimes even marginal farmers. Though the area is still dominated by ex-rajas and big landlords none of them has ever been kidnapped. Perhaps that is because these groups have the muscle and fire-power needed to protect themselves. The kidnapping business here has not grown out of socio-economic disparities. In Patna, IGP Roy elaborated: "In the old days landlords used to have musclemen to protect their properties and grab others' lands. Perhaps some of these men thought kidnapping is a way to get rich quick."

THE POLICE suspect some of the landlords are involved in the kidnappings. Some of these men who have considerable political clout are believed to protect the gangs for a cut. The police suspicion was further strengthened when Father Chakalakal was abducted as the priest was in the habit of taking up the cause of the poor with the police. Most of them were Tharus whose land in the past had been grabbed by the landlords.

Two days before the priest was kidnapped a landless woman had complained to him that her son was being exploited by a landlord. Chakalakal taped her statement and went to the police demanding action. The bandits who kidnapped him took away the tape-recorder. IGP Roy was certain some of the local bigwigs were not happy with the priest's activities, which, coupled with the slack local administration, may have encouraged the kidnapping. Father Kurian, who now looks after the Seva Sadan, says many people think the landlords were annoyed with Chakalakal's activities though there was no open resistance to him. By far the most seriously affected part of West Champaran district has been the Bagaha subdivision running along the Indo-Nepal border. The area is covered with thick forests which provide excellent cover for the kidnappers. In clearings in the jungle cluster the homes of the Tharus. These poor and ignorant tribals frequently provide food and shelter to the criminals as they feel the latter protect them from exploitation.



"We have no vehicles, no arms and no telecommunication facilities, yet we are expected to perform the impossible."

—H.L. Jha, police association chief



Picture by K.M. KISHAN

Police using a borrowed tractor: no equipment

For the past three years the criminals had clearly divided the area up into spheres of operation and ruled almost unchallenged. One of the gangs was led by Laxman Yadav, who had a reward of Rs 20,000 on his head, while the other was led by Sattan, whose capture was worth Rs 10,000. Others who carried handsome rewards for their capture were Nem Yadav, Durup Choudhary, Gulab Yadav, Rabi Mian, Rudal Ahir, and Lal Yadav. Sattan surrendered in 1982 but most of the others met their end in encounters with the police and the police subsequently.

The gang leaders who remain, Ramjatan Nonia, Nema Ahir and Dhuri Ahir, say the police, have joined the group led by one Vyas Dubey. Vyas, according to police records, entered the world of crime in 1982 after fleeing from torture at the hands of some landlords. Today he is the most sought after gang leader.

The state police, after years of ineffectiveness, finally woke up to the need to crush these gangs, a few months ago. A special one-month drive was launched in February to try and nab the kidnappers, but without much success. According to Nayaz Ahmed, SP (Crime), the police had fixed a target of 204 criminals to be arrested but managed to get only

54 of them. Six were killed in encounters and two others, Laxan and Ghaffar, were killed by villagers. Afterwards there was a short lull but the gangs soon returned to their business with the kidnapping of Father Chakalakal.

But though high police and civil officials in Patna and Bettiah were busy chalking out grandiose plans for putting an end to the kidnapping menace those who will have to put those plans into effect were far from being the pillars of efficiency required for the job. The local level police feel immobilised and demoralised and are underequipped and understaffed. Out of 26 police stations only seven have jeeps. "We have to depend on villagers to loan us their tractors to conduct raids, and by the time we get one the criminals disappear into the jungles," says Sachidananda Singh, officer in charge of the Samera Police Station.

Police association chief S.N. Jha says that everyone blames the police and even charges it with connivance with criminals but few realised the constraints the police had to work under. "We have no vehicles, no arms and no telecommunication facilities yet we are expected to perform the impossible," he adds. Many a "police station" in the jungle is without any building or any contact with the outer world, not even a wireless set.

Even as the police are accused of being in league with the kidnappers, some policemen in their turn accuse politicians of demanding money from them. In January the District Police Association specifically mentioned two local MLA's in connection with the demands for money and political pressure. The police also found that some of the "patrons" of the arrested criminals were active politicians of the area. Said a police official: "It is a politician-landlords-criminals gang-up."

Bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency have added to the plight of the people. "When we tried to highlight the kidnapping business and exposed high officials' involvement, we were harassed and threatened," says senior local journalist Jitendra Tiwary. Nagendra Jaiswal, another journalist, adds: "The people of this district are living at the mercy of criminals. There was a time when if you spoke against bureaucrats or criminals you were in trouble. There was hardly any difference between the two then, though the situation has changed slightly." Apparently kidnapping will flourish in this part of the country until a concerted effort is made to break the nexus of vested interests that hold the people in the grip of fear.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bettiah

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Company Meeting: Hindustan Lever Limited

DEVELOPING PEOPLE

Speech delivered by Dr. A.S. Ganguly, Chairman, Hindustan Lever Limited, at the Annual General Meeting held at Bombay on Monday, 25th June, 1984.

In Hindustan Lever, developing people has the same priority as other major business activities, namely growth, profitability, and innovation and diversification. The development of people and the business are so closely linked that what the company is today is wholly due to the efforts and contribution of its employees over the last several decades. This growth and progress, however, could never have been achieved without a deep understanding and appreciation of the changing environment and preparing people to function under these circumstances.

Let's take a look at the environment, especially the country's economic performance. Among the bright spots, we have our spectacular success in boosting farm output. We have also done well in mobilising resources for capital investment and taking education and health services to the masses. On the other hand, in the industrial sphere, the public sector's performance has come under sharper focus and the private sector's achievements are also under pressure in the face of increasing competition. Lack of modernisation, poor productivity and trade union intransigence have all led to rising incidence of industrial sickness. This mixed balance sheet of the state of the economy has had an impact on corporate thinking.

ENVIRONMENT AND CHANGE

The environmental realities have influenced our own business and the manner in which we induct and develop people in the company. Increasing attention is being devoted to training of personnel at different levels and various locations. This includes operators on the shop floor, supervisors and also those engaged in selling and distribution. Even traditional clerical and administrative roles are undergoing change in the face of competitiveness and the need to be cost-effective.

Although this speech is devoted to the changing needs of training and development of business managers, it is equally relevant to the needs of all those who work in different parts of our business. It is so because certain environmental factors—which have a bearing on all endeavours in our country—have greatly enhanced the importance of human resource development. For example, issues like "Modernising Technology" and "Growing Rural Markets" are relevant factors in making the best possible use of our human resources. But since they have been dealt with in my earlier AGM speeches, I would like to highlight here some other key environmental issues:

1. The Indian Manager

Traditionally Indians have been successful traders, seafarers and craftsmen. With the progressive induction of manufacturing technology as well as the growth of the service sector, a different set of skills and knowledge became necessary. The modern Indian professional manager is primarily a product of developments since World War II. The process began with the induction of Indians as managers in foreign-owned companies and the training and induction of the upcoming generation in the rapidly growing family-owned enterprises.

Since the management of modern industry had limited historical experience in this country, in the initial period, inherited styles and practices continued. Soon there was a search for models from outside which could be suitably adapted to meet the country's increasingly complex needs. Management educationists, corporate leaders, as well as policy framers first looked at famous American institutions such as Harvard, Sloan, Stanford, Chicago, North Western, and so on. Lately they have shifted their gaze to the legendary Japanese model. All through this period there was a rapid growth of new institutions such as the IITs and IIMs to cater to the needs of private as well as the newly emerging public sector corporations. Off and on, there was a muted debate on the evaluation of the model of the Indian family-run business. There are famous Indian businesses, such as the House of Tatas, Birlas and several others with exceptional track records who have successfully blended professionalism with tradition. However, this cannot be said about the majority of other businesses. It is a pity that little time and effort have been devoted to understanding the difference between these two systems of management. Perhaps in looking for inspiration from outside the country, we have overlooked our own basic strengths. The core management philosophy in each country is primarily a product of its culture, tradition and social goals, which are judiciously blended into a progressive educational and training system. There is no evidence to suggest that we have begun to think in these terms in our country.

2. Industrial Development

A realistic assessment of economic and industrial progress in our country presents a picture of enormous activity, great achievements and a high degree of self-reliance. It also reveals a number of lost opportunities, disparities in development and unfulfilled dreams. While taking pride in our achievements we need to reflect on our failures since they have been responsible for retarding growth and development.

As a country we boast of having the third largest number of scientists and engineers in the world, or of being the tenth largest in terms of industrial output. But in qualitative as well as per capita terms, these statistics lose much of their significance. In spite of industrial growth, we are being left behind by several other countries in the South. It can be argued that some of these countries have adopted a more short-term and externally over-dependent model or that they have social pressures which are more easily manageable. Nevertheless, we have ourselves begun realising that our growth and development have not only to be more rapid but also more evenly spread than it has been in the past.

In our pursuit of an important objective — import substitution — we had adopted a model of self-reliance which, while achieving a degree of success, did not allow us to benefit from the rapidly changing world technology order. Fortunately there is today a widely shared concern about the decreasing capital:output ratio in the industrial sector, the uncompetitive nature of our industry when faced with export pressures and over-dependence on the monsoons for our major growth area, namely agriculture. This has led to a policy of selective imports and adoption of modern technology.

A change in thinking as reflected in national policies will be the prime determinant of the future. The managers of the economy and the industry will need to comprehend the opportunities these changes are likely to provide in the future and the enormous social and economic impact that their contribution and success can bring to bear upon the nation.

3. Science and Technology

Developments in science and technology are the products of our tradition in the universities and the plan for self-

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reliance. The latter particularly was given impetus by the establishment of several well-known institutions of scientific research after independence. This had two weak links: lack of international contact and renewal, and the absence of the vital activity of converting innovation into industrial technology. Industry on its part was content to live with obsolete technology supplemented occasionally by one-time purchases from abroad.

This has resulted in the gradual erosion of high-quality scientific research and training in the country. The well-known seats of learning and institutes of research have declined in quality and output. The influence of science and scientists on the national economy has, at best, been limited. Many Indian scientists of international repute today reside on American campuses.

The interdependence of science and technology is a highly complex global issue involving geo-economic factors. Therefore, in framing a policy, a balance has to be struck between self-reliance and international linkages, which can help us achieve a desired level of excellence. A major dilemma is being faced in the area of electronics and communications. The great electronics and communications revolution of this century has not benefited us to the same extent as many other countries of the free world. In the rapidly evolving field of bio-technology we can make a greater impact on the economy only if there is wider involvement and participation both in the public as well as the private sectors.

The future of science and technology, a complex policy issue, must be uppermost in the minds of those who are responsible for managing the economy in this country, especially since the gestation periods in this area are rather long.

4. Education

In India the number of people who cannot afford education or can afford only a poor education, has risen enormously. Fortunately, the number of well-educated people who have the perception and tenacity to take society forward has also increased. It is this reservoir of talent which must be given the freedom to act. We must, as a nation, aim to create a large number of educational centres of excellence — centres which will create leaders in business, industry and public life. A sound and constantly improving education system is imperative for achieving national goals — an education system where we are exposed to both knowledge and training, in both content and feeling.

The school and university education upto the graduate level has made remarkable progress in spite of many serious impediments. The emergence of young graduates and the enormous opportunities in this country augurs well for an exciting future. The combination of a well-founded basic education system along with the strengthening of scientific research and innovation will be the ingredients for future growth and prosperity.

5. Innovation

Innovation is the expression of the quality of science/technology education. Given the current state of scientific developments around the world and our own economic priorities, the areas of relevance are communication, agricultural productivity, human health and population control. Since each of these has a place in the scheme of economic priorities, the policies governing scientific research, education and economic/ industrial development will determine the future of innovation and provide the link between research institutes and industry by encouraging the translation of innovation into manufacturing technology.

These unusual issues must be understood and resolved in a systematic and purposeful manner. It is necessary to clarify that innovation is not the exclusive preserve of science and technology. It is a catalyst for bringing about change in all spheres of human activity, and improving the quality of life and thinking—perhaps within our own generation.

6. Human Relations

Human relations mould a society. Expectations about improvement in the quality of life have been generated in India. Since economic achievements have fallen short of expectations, they have created pockets of disaffection. The continuous influx of rural people into the urban industrial sectors has created enormous social problems, compounded by social militancy. Managing enterprises under these conditions requires not only professional competence and foresight but also the ability to grapple with an increasing number of exogenous factors.

While not too long ago we had mistaken a style of life for a necessity of life, present day managers are more attuned to the social commitment of equitable distribution of wealth and resources. They are also aware of the technology alternatives that are available to foster growth. On the whole they are reasonably well-equipped to tackle the modern day problems and need all the encouragement to get on with the task.

However, the tasks are getting more complex. The urban centres are groaning under the pressure of the enormous influx of people, and congestion, exploited by opportunist elements. These are beyond the competence of individual corporations to tackle. Neglect here has led to decay, stagnation and unemployment—a process difficult to reverse—in once flourishing industrial centres in parts of India. Will some of the other industrial metropolises too go the same way? We can ill-afford to let this happen. The Administration must check and control those elements which thrive on exploitation of social tensions. We may have programmes for dispersal of industries and population control, but these are long term ones. If we do not tackle the problems that need our immediate and collective attention, the social and economic costs will be very high indeed.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

While the national and organisational environments have an overwhelming influence on the process of human resource development, certain behavioral factors need to be understood. The training, development and motivation of individuals in an organisation ultimately influence its climate and culture. Therefore, under a given set of macro-conditions described above and our hopes and aspirations for the future, how do we plan and organise ourselves? To attempt an answer, some basic factors need to be examined.

1. Primary factors

Business organisations can survive only if they make a profit, unless they are subsidised by the exchequer. To the extent that businesses have to generate surpluses they have to be cost-effective in all activities. This also applies to the development of people in a company. Generally one tends to assume that all activities leading to the development of individuals will positively contribute to the effectiveness of business. We have questioned this naive notion. Training and development unrelated to the business or the environment is not cost-effective.

The two basic elements in developing people are:

(a) If the goals of the organisation are perceived as challenging, in tune with society, and if they are shared amongst the members of the business, the processes of building the business and the individual tend to be in harmony.

(b) If enough trust is not put in people working in the organisation and they are not given enough autonomy to work, the process of building the business suffers.

Developing human resources means creating a climate of opportunity and professional challenge so that individuals have a sense of achievement and fulfilment. This climate can only result from a readiness to recognise and reward effective performance.

It is, therefore, necessary to create a work environment and organisational ethos which provide the impetus for

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achievement and accountability under a given set of conditions. This is the major task of management in the development process.

In Hindustan Lever any individual who joins the company either as a trainee or a direct recruit or is promoted from the ranks is aware of the fact that it is not possible to either join or progress in the company except on merit. The company on the other hand acknowledges the fact that it is its primary role and responsibility to develop people.

2. Leadership Role

In the prevailing environment in the country, leadership which can rise above sectoral, communal and family interests is difficult to nurture. There develops a subtle atmosphere of self-aggrandizement. Self-interest groups use social and political freedom to further their cause. All these go counter to the national need and the ability to rise above the pressures and temptations of the present. It is, therefore, imperative to steer younger minds towards larger goals and broaden their vision of the future.

Senior management of Hindustan Lever play a very significant role in developing people. Primarily they create a climate of attitude and ethos for growth. It has taken years to build such a climate and it requires persistent efforts on the part of the seniors; for the achievements of several decades can easily be set back by a small mistake or mishap.

The senior management also nurture a climate which emphasises the pursuit of excellence, for only such a climate raises the level of ambition, performance and achievement, so vital for the development of people. Their leadership role is reinforced by the fact that those who have themselves been trained and developed within the organisation over the years and have through their achievements and personal qualities risen to the top rungs of the organisation are best attuned to the development needs of their subordinates.

In a system where a certain degree of attitudinal cloning is unavoidable, a great deal of care needs to be taken to recruit and develop people in a manner which prepares them for tasks which are more complex than what their predecessors may have been called upon to perform. The leadership role blends the wisdom of tradition with foresight.

3. Systems in Development

Ultimately, the development process must be accompanied by an appraisal system which is as objective as possible and consistent. The system must be able to accurately assess the performance, potential, strengths and weaknesses of each individual.

Secondly, appraisal of people needs to be linked with the requirements of tasks to be performed, and appropriate placement to provide experience, challenge, learning and growth. This in turn is derived from the business strategy for growth and manpower planning.

The systems of development provide scope for enhancing an individual's competence. Time and again it has been found that limits of competence keep on extending. Motivation too plays a very important role. Recognition is the prime source of motivation. It is not only recognition by superiors but also by the individual himself of his own contribution. Achievement, contribution and acceptance of responsibility with accountability are products of an interactive and successful development system.

HINDUSTAN LEVER: POLICY AND PRACTICE

Having briefly outlined the development process, I will now examine a few selected areas with reference to our company.

1. Achieving change

A major achievement, during the last 20 years, has been the participation of a number of individuals in bringing about change within the company. This has happened through growth and diversification, through innovation, by catering to changing needs in marketing and distribution while at the same time keeping in tune with the evolution of cultural and social shifts. We have the added advantage of being a part of Unilever, which has been able to blend global opportunities with the economic priorities in a country. This has been supplemented by accepting the highest standards of business ethics, complete and unrestricted flow of expertise and information and upholding the role of the individual as an agent of change.

In growth and diversification, the management strategy led to investments in detergents, new foods and chemicals in a predominantly soaps and vanaspati business. Having resolved the major issue of foreign shareholding, the company is now in the process of reorganisation while planning future growth in chemicals, detergents, personal products, fertilisers and agriculture, as well as reinforcing the thrust in promoting exports.

The establishment of an R & D Centre in 1958 made significant contributions in two areas. Firstly, it helped strengthen some of the traditional businesses by developing new raw materials through science and technology. Secondly, the linkage between scientific discovery and technology transfer has been a very rewarding experience. But more significantly, it has instilled and spread a culture of innovation and enquiry throughout the company. This has now been accepted as a natural expectation from the organisation and those who work in it.

In marketing and distribution, there is a gradual shift in emphasis from the urban to the semi-urban and rural markets. Although this is an area of traditional strength of the company, many innovative changes had to be introduced and continuous experiments on cost-effective methods undertaken.

With the growth of the company and its national corporate base, financial management, tax and investment planning, locational logic, and so on have all acquired wider dimensions.

The matrix of individuals' competence and the organisational needs is becoming more complex. It is for this reason that much more attention needs to be paid to these issues now than ever before.

2. Selection and Development

In Hindustan Lever the tradition of developing people dates back to over four decades. Among those who work in the company are people of considerable experience and accomplishment. They have reached the ranks of management and other senior positions from within the organisation. The process of creating opportunities for people with potential is a continuous one. The activity derives strength from its consistency, honesty and fairness. In an environment palpitating with regionalism, casteism and elitism, the total disregard for such considerations reinforces the basic strengths of the company and reflects in its character.

Discipline, productivity and team work are important characteristics. But along with these, each person, whatever his rank, must possess leadership qualities to be able to rise. It is only those who are able to lead men and be accountable — and derive considerable satisfaction from it — who can rise in the Hindustan Lever system.

In achieving success, the incentives are not only financial rewards, but new experience, challenge, learning and growth. We believe our people perform better not only because our goals are in tune with the environment, but also because one of the important criteria in evaluating achievement is the ability to constructively interact with people and accomplish difficult but clear objectives.

The direct recruits and trainees undergo a well-structured induction programme during the initial probationary period. In spite of the company's elaborate and well tested recruitment procedure we firmly believe that the individual as well as the company must ensure, through a period of fair trial and testing, that it is a durable and potentially productive match. Once this has been confirmed, it becomes the responsibility of the company to pro-

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vide the opportunity for growth in a planned manner.

To start with, the recruit is provided training and the opportunity to make the best possible use of his ability in the task he is assigned such as marketing and sales, manufacturing, engineering and development, finance and commercial, legal, personnel and so on. For scientific research, skills and training are of a different order and recruitment necessitates search in the international market.

In the career development process spanning the working life of an individual, emphasis is placed on a number of important criteria, such as:

(a) The ability to innovate in the individual's field of specialisation;

(b) To be able to interact positively with people above and below and be an effective team member;

(c) Ability to lead a group of men and achieve a set of objectives;

(d) Create an environment of healthy competition and commitment to excellence;

(e) Be sensitive to environmental and social realities in order to accomplish tasks ethically and honestly.

These simple criteria create an organisational atmosphere of fairness in matters of rewards and recognition. Furthermore, they generate a degree of confidence and competence which permits mobility across disciplines and functions as a rule rather than as an exception.

Effective and successful training and development systems which have withstood the test of time have been gradually extended to every part of the business; from operators and supervisors in the manufacturing units, to clerical and other staff in the offices and branches as well as to the field force engaged in selling and distribution. Of late it has been successfully extended to the training and communication requirements of our stockists and distributors with particular emphasis on rural markets.

The ease with which an organisation like Hindustan Lever can accomplish such complex tasks is facilitated by the fact that the ownership of the company is widely dispersed amongst a large number of shareholders and the disadvantages of a master-servant relationship do not exist. It might sound like a simple and mundane fact but it is a significant strength which is not always fully comprehended.

3. Participation and growth

Let us now consider another important development, namely the changing pattern of interaction with people. The traditional distinctions between urban and rural, owner and manager, manager and worker are getting blurred. We have people in Hindustan Lever who are competent not only in the managerial sense, but are highly responsive to social changes. We insist that our people maintain a high standard of reputation as men of integrity and ability despite the fact that conflicting forces are present in the environment. We strive to create an appropriate human relations climate in the organisation with genuine concern for fellow men.

Today, we expect managers not only to be competent in their own areas, but to have an inherent ability and inclination to be able to communicate with their peers and subordinates. Workers' participation in management has been talked about for the past few years as a panacea for many of our industrial relations problems. Since managers and trade union leaders in India could not readily comprehend the concept and since historically the environment was not conducive to this sort of participative activity in a hierarchical society, it failed to take off. Management experts told us about the Dutch model and the German model — but none of these could work under a different set of social conditions. There is so much to gain through participation. Yet, we have had little progress. What is the remedy? It seems to me that all of us concerned — manager, employees and trade unions — need totally new attitudes to overcome this impasse. More important, we need to free ourselves from some deeply rooted prejudices and outdated values and beliefs.

There are, however, winds of change. People have started questioning the concept of high consumption urban islands as the ideal of success. The early Indian managers attempted to imitate a life-style which was alien. Their relationship with the workforce possibly was not dissimilar. But all this is now being replaced by a new set of socially conscious and highly competent second and third generation Indian managers. It is significant that one of the areas which young trainees in Hindustan Lever find particularly rewarding is the working period spent by them at our Integrated Rural Development Programme in Etah.

Social pressures and the stark economic realities are thus forcing a re-evaluation of the urban symbols of success. However, the unfortunate conflict in the new situation is the black economy and increasing scale of graft and corruption.

A change is also occurring in the thinking of responsible sections of trade union leaders and workers, especially in those parts of the country where militancy in the past has led to economic ruin and human misery. Responsible and constructive union leadership has significantly benefited their constituents through legitimate means and in certain cases have contributed to improvement in productivity as well. It is under such conditions that rapport and two-way communication become more meaningful.

We believe it is necessary and prudent to share information on long-term opportunities as well as problems of the organisation so that when certain actions are taken their logic is not seen to be strange and threatening. Even in areas where militancy dominates and aspirations outdistance abilities, efforts to improve human relations may be twice as difficult but twice as necessary at the same time. Since communications and human relations programmes transcend narrow sectoral interests, the appeal of information sharing is enormous. Such an exercise must be judiciously blended with the workers' leadership role in modernisation, welfare, sports, children's education and other forms of family participation.

Creating a congenial human relations climate is an organisation's major responsibility. It is the primary task of managers. I sincerely believe that a combination of professional competence, genuine human concern and awareness of national and social values are imperative for conduct of successful business in India.

4. Communications

The nature of the business and its commitment to growth necessitates readiness on the part of the managers to communicate with people at all levels. This task is both simple as well as complex in certain respects. People today are better informed and are more knowledgeable. Furthermore, their questioning attitude about business and industry must be attended to. While in the company we normally do this by constantly updating systems and channels through on-the-job dialogue, works committees, trade unions, training courses, house journals, sports and cultural forums, it is also necessary to consider certain broader aspects of the subject.

It is recognised all over the world that good communication is indispensable to good business. As a result of the rapid development of the microprocessor and mini-computers, information synthesis and transmission are becoming not only routine but indispensable. But the essence of communication is not only transmission of information but of human dialogue. I believe communication is at the centre of all the changes which are occurring now and some which we can anticipate. Whether in innovation or development of technology or in marketing or in information sharing with employees, a well thought out and long-term policy is essential. Possibly the single most important function it performs is to send information upwards from different levels within the company and outside, thus greatly increasing the awareness

(Continued)

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DEVELOPING PEOPLE

of the environment amongst corporate decision-makers. Finally, communication is not an expertise, it is an essential management quality to be used effectively, and ideally, naturally.

External communication is equally vital. The economic press and business journals provide a useful service to the investing public. People in the farming community have access to transistor radios and now progressively to television. The trade channels are also better organised with improved services and are more widely spread, and in spite of shortages, the consumer is much better informed, better organised and more demanding. It is, therefore, increasingly unproductive to undertake corporate activities in isolation and away from the glare.

Awareness of these environmental factors and developing the ability to respond to the relevant ones during a working life are becoming an essential part of management. It is not enough to be aware, but each of these issues needs to be discussed and analysed in order to appreciate what influence it could have on our activities.

In various spheres we are probably witnessing a slow integration and interaction of different affected groups beyond the realm of controls and regulations. The situation of shortages and high prices as well as the restricted availability of goods and services has affected the community and consumers rather severely. That this state of affairs is unacceptable to society as a whole is now being widely acknowledged. The response to these issues as well as the opportunities that they provide are ingredients which will test the manager's ability to successfully cope with change.

CONCLUSION

More than any other human activity, the one which probably has the maximum influence on succeeding generations, is the development of people. The modern industrial culture in India is relatively new. So is the breed of the Indian professional manager. While he has been praised around the world for his hard work, dedication, intelligence and accomplishments, within India his record has been less exciting. While a fair amount of time has been devoted to adapting alien management cultures, little has been done to understand the impact of the country's economic policies, postures and regulatory legislations and their influence on development.

However, even within the conditions that obtain, successive generations of highly competent managers have been developed by many industries and corporations who have chosen to stay and work in the country and whose performance and track record match some of the best in the world. It is, therefore, necessary to examine from time to time, those factors and issues which constitute the elemental part of a successful human development process in a fast changing society. In the ultimate analysis, a country's roots in its culture, tradition and social goals determine the management philosophy. Its educational and training systems which provide industry and the society leaders of tomorrow must reflect this. Hindustan Lever is conscious of its commitment to the future and the company will continue to accord the highest priority to the task of developing people for meeting the challenges ahead.

Note: This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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PUNJAB

The Press Under Stress

FOR THE media as a whole, reporting the drama in Punjab has been a traumatic challenge, faced as it was with deciding between what was in the national interest and what required to be reported. For the media in Punjab, that decision has been doubly difficult. Editors and reporters in Jalandhar's 10 daily newspapers (combined circulation: 3.5 lakh) and in Patiala are already faced with pre-censorship, bringing back memories of the Emergency. Every day, the censors' scissors hack away whole columns of news, and the resulting product is a mockery of objective reportage.

But the real struggle between the media and the censors is taking place in Chandigarh where the administration armed with special powers to regulate the examination of news on Punjab has declared war on the Chandigarh edition of the *Indian Express*, the one paper in the state that has been more outspoken in reporting the situation in Punjab. Till last fortnight, the Chandigarh administration had registered a total of 27 cases against the paper for what it views as infringement of the special laws that now govern the media in its reportage on the troubled state.

However, the *Express* has no intention of caving in to such pressure since it is transparently obvious that both sides have their own interpretation of the law which stands. The notification issued under the Punjab Special Powers Act (1956) on June 3 leaves the interpretation deliberately vague. It states: "The President is pleased to prohibit for a period of two months the reporting, transmission, printing, publication or otherwise dissemination in any document ... of any matter relating to the current agitation in Punjab ... which are likely to create feelings of disharmony, enmity, hatred, ill-will, distrust or fear between the different communities or affect public order."

Under that wide-ranging interpretation, the administration first registered a case against the *Express* and the less troublesome Chandigarh-based *Tribune* (circulation: 1.7 lakh) for a small news item which stated that four senior secretaries of the Punjab Government had decided to take leave for *kar sewa* in the Golden Temple. The *Tribune* took the hint and became more circumspect in its reporting. But on June 20, the administration registered 27 separate cases against the *Express* taking objection to news reports and pictures that appeared in their paper between June 8 and June 19. Reporters who were responsible for the stories were tracked down by police officials in a effort to find out the sources of the reports.



Police questioning an *Indian Express* photographer (right): battle royal

But an analysis of the offending reports would indicate that the administration is indulging in more of a witch-hunt and taking the special powers to absurd extremes. One such report merely reported the fact that the Punjab Government had sent a team of engineers and architects to the Golden Temple to make an estimation of the damage.

Another news item found objectionable was the one headlined "Khushwant Singh returns Padma Bhushan", a fact that every paper in the country had also reported. Other "objectionable" items included the post mortem report on Bhindranwale and the report that jawans were clearing out the debris in the Golden Temple. In addition, three photographs showing jawans alighting from a truck outside a gurudwara in Chandigarh's sector 19; Delhi's Bangla Sahib gurudwara and a burnt market-place in Amritsar were also considered objectionable and likely to create communal disharmony.

Clearly, the *Express* group, owned by the redoubtable Ramnath Goenka, is determined to fight for its right to cover Punjab without what it feels is unnecessary and unjustified hindrance. "We have told the Chandigarh Chief Commissioner Krishan Banarji, that we shall continue to report the events in Punjab according to the highest traditions of responsible journalism," says Express News Service chief Hiranmay Karlekar who had rushed to Chandigarh last week to discuss the matter with the administration. Governor B.D. Pande, however, refused to meet him and Karlekar finally met Banarji for a meeting which he described as "very cordial in which he (Banarji) stuck to his guns and I to mine".

Banarji and administration officials, however, insist that the cases against the *Express* are justified and the battle is likely to intensify with Goenka and *Express* Editor George Verghese having issued instructions to their reporters touring Punjab to continue filing stories regardless of the number of cases being filed against them.

But the determination to carry on reporting regardless of the consequences has paid some dividends. Circulation of the Chandigarh edition has jumped from 56,000 to 70,000 over a 10-day period mainly at the expense of the *Tribune* which has opted to toe the line.

In Jalandhar, a city where the press is sharply divided along communal lines, the censorship has been widely accepted and even welcomed. "It was a wise step" opines Sadhu Singh Hamdard, editor of the city's leading Punjabi daily, *Ajit*. But even then the censorship rules have sown seeds of confusion. The officials in charge of censorship are usually junior officials from departments as varied as food and supplies, excise and public relations, and in many instances even items telecast by Doordarshan or All India Radio have been disallowed. Statements by the prime minister and the army generals in Punjab have also not been spared by over-enthusiastic censors. "How can we function when the censors are allergic to the very word Punjab?" says one of the editors, voicing the opinions of many others.

But what is more worrying to the editors is the steady drop in circulation. But by last week, the real focus was on the impending battle between the *Express* and the Chandigarh administration which is now to be decided in a court of law and will, ultimately, affect all the newspapers in Punjab.

—GOBIND THUKRAL



Strikers pelting ABP hawkers

ANANDA BAZAR GROUP

Deadlocked

CALCUTTA, the bastion of militant trade unionism, is currently witnessing a bizarre battle between trade unions desperate to maintain their clout in the Ananda Bazar Patrika Limited, the state's largest publishing house. By last fortnight, it was evident that the battle, which was initially confined to a group of Ananda Bazar workers and the management, had become a prestige issue for the left wing trade unions and could have repercussions in industries throughout West Bengal. "The perspective of the battle has changed completely and has now become a fight for fundamental trade union rights," observed Jaygopal Roy, leader of the West Bengal Newspaper Employees Federation (WBNEF) and secretariat member of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the trade union wing of the CPI(M).

The change in the dimensions of the Ananda Bazar dispute began with the decision of non-striking employees and the management to assert their rights guaranteed in the Constitution and approach the courts for permission to enter their office premises. On June 12, Justice Ajit Kumar Sengupta of the Calcutta High Court ordered the state Government and the police to remove the strikers picketing the office and provide assistance to willing employees and the management to enter the office. But when journalists and other employees of Ananda Bazar marched to the office in the afternoon of June 14, the workers refused them entry and retaliated.

"The management had goondas with them and hit us first so we had to retaliate," claimed Subodh Bose, WBNEF secretary and principal correspondent in the Amrita Bazar group of publications, the main competitor of the Ananda Bazar group in the state. Whatever the reasons, the retaliation was bloody: several non-strikers had their teeth knocked out and limbs batters by lathi blows.

"But the strikers even with their lathis could not hold off the mob of employees bent upon returning to their office," said S.P. Singh, *Ravivar* editor. The employees successfully brought out "Extraordinary Editions" of *The Telegraph* and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, breaking 51 days of total silence. Also, for the first time a major strike indirectly supported by the state's most powerful union had been forcibly broken by willing employees.

The implications of this for trade union leaders was obviously disturbing. "Our strike is not illegal though the management maintains otherwise. It is a protest against the management's provocative actions," explained Roy. However, what Roy did not point out was that if the Ananda Bazar management got away with what they had done, other employers could in future use loyal workers to break strikes.

The second phase of action by the strikers and their trade union supporters started almost immediately after publication was resumed. Marauding groups went about the city attacking Ananda Bazar delivery vans, assaulting hawkers going to pick up copies, tearing and burning copies snatched from hawkers and urging everybody not to buy the group's publications. Judging from the scale of operations, the attacks suggested that the strikers received help from CPI(M) and CITU cadres. While denying the intimidation Roy claimed this was just a "worki class movement and has nothing to with the freedom of the press". That ment, it appears, justifies the beating of non-striking employees, threat women employees and demanding total closure of the Ananda Baza of publications.

In the midst of all this, the puzzling was the deliberate inactio the police. Though Section 144 was im sed within 250 metres of the office police did nothing to prevent the hol up of hawkers at the head of the ro brickbatting and squatting within the stricted area. Police officers privately mitted that they had been instruc against using tear gas or lathis to disp demonstrators. The only job the po had been asked to do was to protect office building, which they did. "It's the job of the police to escort Ana Bazar employees to their offices," Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in defen their inaction.

"We told the chief minister tha events in Ananda Bazar are a clear br of law and order and it is the respons ty of the Government to maintain and order," said Aveek Sarkar, the ma ging editor of the Ananda Bazar grou publications. According to him, Basu said he deplored the violen gave an assurance that steps woul taken to stop it. Yet every morning kers are being intimidated and at even assaulted for trying to collect the pers. "How this can go on is a myste me," confessed Sarkar. Subodh Bo confident that hawkers will soon sto ting Ananda Bazar publications.

"In this stalemate there are only losers," remarked M.J. Akbar, editor *Sunday* and *The Telegraph*, "the mana ment which is losing money and the Front which is losing votes." The eff of this dispute, because of the inv ment of all trade unions except tho the INTUC, is fast spreading to other ces. All Calcutta papers suspended cation of their June 22 editions as WBNEF called a strike in support of Ananda Bazar cause. Employees of *Economic Times* Calcutta edition physically prevented from entering office and one of them was also assau Speaking for the trade unions, Roy red: "We will not give up this fight and could even resort to a state-wide strik no solution to this impasse is found

— INDRANIL BANER

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VARDHAMAN CREATIVE

DANCE

The Right Moves

WHEN my father first saw me dancing on stage he said, 'If they make you jump so high all the time then they should pay you more .'' The first born son of a Punjabi taxi-driver doing ballet splits in famous theatres all over Europe? The wonder of it is that it is true. A slim, slight young man with a chiselled Roman profile, Darshan Bhullar comes from the younger generation of Indians who have taken up the British challenge to integrate. Bhullar, 21, is a member of the London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT), a modern dance group founded by Robert Cohan, a former dancer with the Martha Graham dance company.

Bhullar was born in Singapore where his father worked as a taxi-driver. The family returned to their village in Punjab for three years before emigrating to Britain in 1965. Bhullar grew up in a totally Punjabi immigrant community in Leeds. "I began to get interested in modern dance I guess when I was about 11 in school. We used to do dance and movement and things like that. Then in my middle school they had modern dance as a subject so I went for it." He later applied for the Theatre Arts Course at Intake High School in Leeds to acquire training in ballet before being accepted by the London School of Contemporary Dance (the associated school for the LCDT) at the early age of 15. Speaking of his family's reaction to his choosing such an unusual career, Bhullar said: "My father didn't understand what I want to do but he was more worried about whether I would get a good job."

A young man with an engaging, self-effacing manner Bhullar joined the LCDT in 1980 and has been working both as choreographer and full time dancer for the company which is a mix of British, American, West Indian, Israeli and Chinese dancers, musicians and choreographers. The LCDT has no principal dancers and star roles in each work are given to the most suitable dancers. With the Ballet Rambert company the LCDT represents the two main schools of modern dance in Britain. Bhullar has choreographed works for the LCDT; his first piece called *Beyond the Law* was based on a play by the exiled South African writer Athol Fugard about an illegal love affair between a black and a white South African. In 1982 he was commissioned by the London Dance Theatre to create a work which was performed before Pope John Paul in Cardiff. He has also had works commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain and makes a point of going back to his old school in Leeds to teach whenever he can.



Bhullar in performance: dynamic power

Bhullar describes "contemporary dance" as a collaboration of movements from different parts of the world and different dance styles fused together". Each company tries to evolve a distinctive dance style of it's own. Says Bhullar: "When I choreograph a piece of work I start with an emotional thought or story. Next I work on the music I want to use and then plan the work on paper like a film storyboard. Finally we move to dancers." Although he has had no formal training in Indian dance Bhullar is familiar with this form through performances he has seen. "I sometimes use Indian dance movements in my work or movements from the martial arts like judo or karate in which I am very interested." At school he played football but his potential as a dancer was realised by his dance teacher. Said his dance teacher Nadine Senior: "He was good enough to be a professional footballer when he was at this school but that made it all right when he wanted to be a dancer."

Tatler magazine was ecstatic about him: "In a company of remarkable and individual artistes, Bhullar stands out as a dancer of dynamic power whose very flexible body gives a special fluidity to all his movements." The *Yorkshire Evening Post* called him "one of the brightest new stars of the London Contemporary Dance Theatre" and the "contemporary dancer most likely to succeed in 1983". Bhullar takes all this praise with a shake of the head and a shy smile. "I have had no problems with getting work or being accepted here," he says. What about in India? "I visited India in 1980 and went to my father's village in Logah, Punjab. There I showed my relatives photographs of the company and of dancing they were very proud to know that I was dancing with an internationally known company." Bhullar doesn't see himself as part of the jet set or Britain's beautiful people. "Do you know what I enjoyed most in my visit to India?" he asks. "I loved working on my uncle's fields in the village. I would like to spend a few months in India in a place like that again." Recently he saw a British TV documentary on Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra Academy in Madras. "That's the kind of school I would like to work and live in if I went to India." The LCDT plans to tour India this autumn but because of financial cuts in the Arts Council the tour was cancelled. The company goes instead to Los Angeles to perform in a pre-Olympic show organised by the Olympic Committee in the US. It will be India's loss if this accomplished young dancer is not seen because of the lack of a few pounds and rupees.

— BONNY MUKHERJI


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THIS lush, coffee-table book is essentially a collection of coloured reproductions of miniature paintings with an introductory essay. The paintings are of the Mughal, Deccani, Rajasthani and Pahari schools of the period from the 16th to the 19th century. The paintings come from a private collection, obviously substantial but owners remain anonymous, leaving it to the book to publicise the collection. Since the colour reproductions are the main attraction of the book it is unfortunate that they are not of the best quality. Although the book was printed in Switzerland, the superimposition of colours is at times inexact and gives on occasion a blurred effect to the smaller details of the paintings, not to mention an untidily visible overlapping of colours in some of the margins.

The text is a useful summary of known knowledge on miniature painting of this period. Although the paintings are recognisable as genre types, there are few reproductions of the more classic examples which would have been worthwhile points of reference. Not everyone will agree with the attributions either, as the author himself states at the beginning of the book.

Miniature painting started as book illustration and this dates back to well before the Mughal period. There could therefore have been more discussion with illustrations of the influence of Jaina painting on the Rajasthani schools, recognising the fact that these paintings were also significant both to monastic and courtly circles. The bringing of Persian artists to India by the early Mughals could have been more effectively stated by showing some better examples of the Persian miniature tradition and particularly those with a bearing on the evolution of the Mughal school. The Mughals consciously converted miniature painting into an art in its own right. This process which is referred to in this book still requires to be more fully explored, both in terms of aesthetic sensibilities as well as the various reasons why it came to be appreciated as an art form in the many courts of that period.

Illustrated books such as the *Hamzanama, Baburnama, Akbarnama* or *Razmanama* (Mahabharata), are not only the personal testaments of the emperors, but where they constitute other categories of literature are indicative of the intellectual interests of the court. That Jehangir was a naturalist is well known but one would also like to be familiarised with what this meant in the wider context of his times. Whereas the miniature style travelled to other courts and was adopted, it would be worth examining whether the intellectual pursuits also followed suit.

Mention is made of the setting up of ateliers and of painters attached to various courts in Rajasthan and the Himachal hill-states. But we are given tantalisingly little information on who the artists were, how they came to be attached to particular patrons and why were such paintings so prized.

Of the "Rajput Painting in the Plains" as the section is subtitled, perhaps the most unusual are the architectural studies from Mewar, Kishangarh and Jaipur, which might almost have been the inspiration for the exotica of the Brighton pavilion! Some of the best paintings on the theme of Krishna-worship are by Sahib-din. Pratapaditya Pal rightly draws attention to the fascinating juxtaposition of forms and colours which are strikingly contemporary. The gradual change of scene from the pastoral to the palatial in the paintings is in keeping with changes in the different mannerisms and sentiments of courtly love.

"Rajput Painting in the Hills" covers the section generally referred to as the Pahari schools of which Bilaspur, Basholi and Kangra were perhaps the most notable. These carry on the traditions of both the Mughal and the Rajasthani schools but with a new liveliness which is their own invention and doubtless reflects the coming of age, as it were, of these hill-states.

—ROMILA THAPAR

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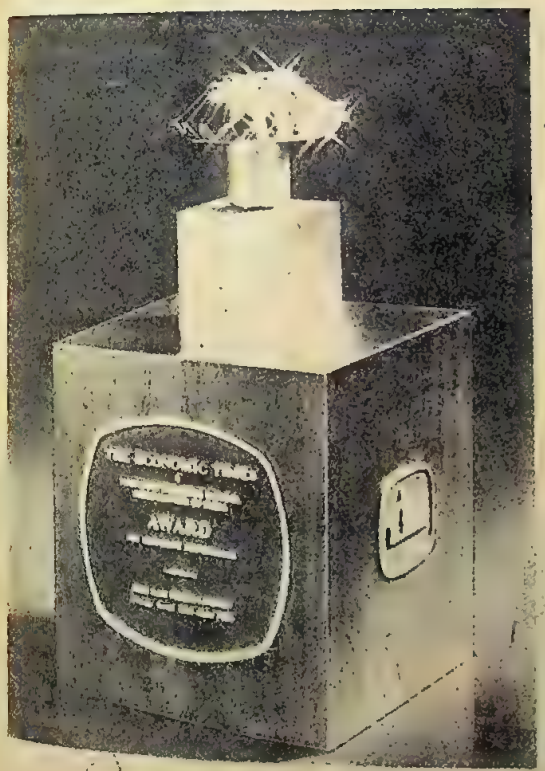
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DIRECTED BY: *Satyajit Ray*
CAST: *Soumitra Chatterjee, Victor Bannerjee, Swatilekha Chatterjee*

GHARE BAIRE (the home and the world) is Ray's one from the heart. The idea of filming the Tagore novel began in 1950, but the urge, like an old toothache, returned around the twilight of Satyajit Ray's career. And, considering the fact that Ray is very sick—he underwent an open-heart surgery at Houston's Texas Heart Institute last fortnight after three successive cardiac arrests—his state-of-the-art film could well have been like the final flourish in a Verdi aria, for the story was tailor-made to put Ray back in his elements.

It had the right Checkovian background of a bygone Bengal aristocracy, the dilemma of a leisured but enlightened class, the feminist concern of a society in transition—in short, all the ingredients for which his earlier *Charulata* (1964) and *Jalsaghar* (1958) are loved. It also had the historicity and the richness of detail that mark most of Ray's cinema, and a strong dramatic structure. After a spell of bad health and worse films (nothing significant since *Shatranj Ke Khilari* in 1977) he could have bounced back. But he didn't.

It would certainly have been less embarrassing for his admirers, if he had planned *Ghare Baire* on a lower key. But Ray has himself denied such benefit of the doubt by attempting the film on a big scale. The film's rich tapestry of external details—its fine colour photography, its lavish array of carefully chosen dramatic properties and its brilliant sets—immunise Ray against charges of half-heartedness. The film looks like an intended failure to its last reel.

From the first shot, opening with a sepia-tinted portrait of rich landlord Nikhilesh (Victor Bannerjee) and wife Bimala (debutante Swatilekha Chatterjee), with Swatilekha's narration run as voice-over, the film plunges headlong into serious business. And, in its 15 reels, it simply has too many things to do: to establish the period (1907); to create a romantic triangle almost by force, and then to impose an equally artificial resolution on it; to interpret Bengal's history and politics around the 1905 partition of the province; and, as if all this was not enough, to 'universalise' the political-sexual message which seems reducible to the following axiom—revolutionaries may make good lovers but rightists are better husbands.

Nikhilesh, the idealist "raja" of Suksayar, plays Professor Higgins to his wife, hiring an English governess to teach her Highland songs, piano-playing and pouring tea correctly. The reformed wife then steps out into the big bad world, crossing the limits of the *zenana*. Her first encounter with a man other than her husband becomes a disaster, for Sandip Bannerjee (played by Soumitra Chatterjee, veteran of 11 Ray films) is a lady-killer and a phoney revolutionary who publicly makes bonfire of European goods but is known to have dallied with women both *swadeshi* and foreign; he smokes a French cigarette. The husband is too effete (or too refined) to prevent his wife from being ensnared by Sandip's false charms and his radical but amoral politics.

Sandip's political activities, though resented by friend Nikhilesh, ultimately wreak havoc on the people of Suksayar. The poor Muslim peasants, forced not to buy the cheaper foreign goods, fall prey to communalist propaganda and riots break out. And Sandip escapes, not waiting to own up to the consequence of his action. Bimala realises her folly, [illegible] too late by then because Nikhilesh [illegible] away to the trouble spot never to [illegible]

The first shock that awaits [illegible] viewer is the selection of two of the [illegible] crucial protagonists. Tagore visuali[illegible] Bimala as a tall, slim woman, "dark [illegible] steel". But Ray's Bimala resembles [illegible] overweight housewife with layers [illegible] around her neck and jowls which [illegible] her face from registering any fine [illegible] of emotion. Her costume and [illegible] painfully churn up memories of *Charu[illegible]ta*, but her potrayal is not even [illegible] ghost of Madhabi Mukherjee's unfo[illegible]table characterisation of the sens[illegible] woman consciously making a moral [illegible]ce. The selection of Swatilekha will [illegible] down as a howler in Ray's 29-year [illegible] film career where not one instance of [illegible] scasting has ever occurred.

Soumitra Chatterjee's portrayal [illegible] Sandip also lacked vigour though the [illegible] needed robust, animal vitality. Chatter[illegible] is now fiftyish and is certainly not at [illegible] height of his thespian talent to convin[illegible]gly portray the charming rake. But [illegible] inexplicable casting is merely the ou[illegible] wrapping to the core of the [illegible] problem—its lack of a lived-in [illegible] Neither passion nor politics in *[illegible] Baire* seems to enjoy a life of-its [illegible]

Bimala's extra-marital affair [illegible] Sandip, for example, is presented with[illegible] any preparation. Ray's script, in its [illegible] ning section prior to Sandip's appe[illegible]ce, provides no clue to Bimala's vul[illegible] bility, or, in Ray's own language, [illegible] inner weave" of her character. Again[illegible]

Bannerjee: rising above his role





Swatilekha and Chatterjee as the lovers: an illogical affair

...ds to contrast it with *Charulata*, where ...haru's attraction for brother-in-law ...mal (played—incredibly, it seems now—by Chatterjee himself) grows organically like a plant on the soil adequately provided by the script. Charu's emotional ...physical alienation from Bhupati, her ...intellectual husband, is so poetically established earlier that her involvement with Amal seems not only natural ...evitable.

NOT SO in *Ghare Baire*. Why a sensitive and accomplished woman like Bimala, loved and well cared for by her husband, falls head over heels for a dissimulating politician, and that too at first sight, is a moot question. The flaws in her "inner weave" remain unexplained. Ray papers it over by showing Bimala and Sandip kissing, for the first time on the Bengali screen, as even the camera seems to nervously look away from the inherent illogicality of the relationship.

The final resolution of the triangle is as arbitrary as its foisting. Why does Bimala take such an inordinately long time to detect the evil in Sandip? Her final realisation comes through a *deus ex machina* character, Amulya, a sincere revolutionary disciple of Sandip, who tells her of Sandip's greed for money, his avarice and his expensive life-style. This information is by no means new to Bimala, but she is ordained by the script to regard it as the breaking point in her relationship with Sandip. Like puppets on a string, the characters are paired and disengaged without their ever stopping to pin-point the motivating urges.

It is this arbitrariness which stymies the love story as well as the political component of the film. Nikhilesh's quiet humanism is pitted against Sandip's sham radicalism which puts end above means, and self-interest above both. But somehow the political standpoints are never etched roundly.

Sandip enters the screenplay with a sequence of oratory, witnessed by Bimala from the balcony above, sitting behind a screen. Despite the smooth execution of the sequence, the speech confuses the audience in respect of Sandip's politics. What is it anyway? Mushy Congress politics of the pre-Gandhi era? Terrorism of the variety of Kshudiram, the martyr? Saffron radicalism of the kind described in Bankim Chattopadhyay's novel, *Anandamath* (from where Sandip's oft-chanted *Bande Mataram*, is taken)? An Indianised version of Garibaldi's views? What?

The speech, written by Ray himself, is the first step towards obfuscation of the political issue in *Ghare Baire*. It multiplies as Ray accepts in toto Tagore's thesis that the boycott movement, led by men like Sandip, was anti-poor in its essence and could lead only to communal conflagration because Muslims represented the poor masses in Bengal. The question is, is it true of the entire movement? If so, why did such a palpably fraudulent movement succeed in its avowed objective of drawing enough popular support to thwart Curzon's plan for vivisection of Bengal?

But perhaps Ray's Sandip is not typical of his genre; and Ray's rejection of radicalism is not *per se*. Perhaps Sandip heralds the entry of Satan in Ray's Garden of Eden, because in no other film of his does one remember having encountered an unalloyed villain. As a matter of fact, Soumitra Chatterjee puffs away at his cigarettes like a modern-day Amrish Puri, and brings a neurotic glint in his eyes at close up, to leave no one in doubt as to his ranking in cinematic demonology. But, alas, the script does not even allow him to play the devil incarnate. Towards the final scene, he comes back to return the cash that he had wheedled out of a gullible Bimala. In his first encounter with her, he sings the peppy lines of an anti-partition Tagore song (sung by Kishore Kumar) with the coy flirtatiousness of a Don Juan reliving his adolescence.

He looks every inch the talkative arm-chair revolutionary, too confused to achieve his professed goal, and too delicate to play the hard-headed villain. It seems downright contrived when he mouths such lines as: "Why should I be satisfied with what I have got? I must snatch away from others." It is like Desdemona saying Iago's lines.

But Victor Bannerjee rises majestically above his role, the screenplay, and finally the director. In the brilliantly photographed intimacy of their bedroom, he creates moments of ineffable compassion and sympathy with Swatilekha. He understands and re-enacts the dignity of the Ray-esque aristocrat in the true tradition of Bishwambhar Roy (*Jalsaghar*) and Bhupati (*Charulata*). When Bimala understands her folly, he embraces her with the words: "Poor thing, you haven't seen another man in ten years." The words, as spoken by him, vibrate with shades of emotion—forgiving, yet self-justifying.

And, of course, the film has its magical moments. Like Nikhilesh and Bimala walking down the corridor, openly for the first time, in slow motion and with an abandon as heady as champagne. Like the last tragic sequence when Bimala gazes out of the big window as the procession carrying Nikhilesh's body snakes its way through the grounds of her house with the strains of *darbari* alternating with the roll of a funeral drum on the sound-track.

But the film fatally suffers in its unavoidable comparison with *Charulata*. *Ghare Baire* may be a better 'researched' film, with even more authentic sets and properties, but it lacks entirely the empathy and warmth of the classic he made 20 years ago. In 1964, Ray had experienced Charulata; today he has only tried to know Bimala like a meticulous student of History.

—SUMIT MITRA

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400 m relay quartet (from left) Rao, Usha, Abraham and Valsamma: slim hopes

LYMPIC TRIALS

Battling for Berths

DIA and the Olympics have never really got on well together. The only ories that Indian sportsmen have something medal-winning in the -yearly two-week 'citius, altius, for- xtravaganza—the hockey success notwithstanding—was 84 years ago when an Anglo-Indian named rnest Pritchard took the silver in the metres and in 1952 when bantam-ight wrestler Kha-Shaba Jadhav won a onze. However, there was no sign last ursuight that that meagre record was ighing on the minds of India's sports asses as the contingent for the Los ngeles Olympiad was being chosen. In a ield of trials, 46 men and women had been cleared, while the heads of various ederations asked for more.

The raison d'etre of the optimistic ush was simply that the Russians and heir comrades from the eastern bloc were not coming. This factor figured promi-ently in the feverish calculations which preceded the selection. The Amateur thletics Federation of India, for instan-e, recommended the names of 16 athle-es—nine men and six women. The federa-ion's calculations showed that the erson most likely to win a medal was the oubtable P.T. Usha in the 400 metre urdles; according to V.K. Verma, ma-ager-designate of the athletics cont-ngent, she is slated for a silver. Next in ine was the 4x400 metre relay quartet of sha, M.D. Valsamma, Shiny Abraham nd Vandana Rao.

The other athletes are nowhere in the calculations. High jump star N. Annavi, who enthralled Delhi with a record-breaking jump nearly two months ago, is 28th in the list of the world's jumpers, a sobering indication of the distance India has to cover before it gets within sighting distance of the victory stands. Discus star Ajmer Singh is 13th while dash artiste Adile Sumariwala is a distant 28th in the line-up for the glamour 100-metre sprint. Says Sumariwala: "I'm not likely to get anywhere in Los Angeles. The trouble is, even if we improve our timings, the others out there are improving faster."

Usha is non-committal about her chances in the 400 metre hurdles. "I think I can make it to the last eight," she says hesitantly. "With the Russians and the East Germans out of it I'll make it to the final, but that's as far as I can say. A medal? Let's see." Usha's time at the trials was a respectable 55.7 seconds. The current best is slightly over 54 seconds—by a Russian—and Usha's coach O.M. Nambiar is non-committal: "I'm not saying she can't do it. I'm just saying that she will have to work very very hard."

One squad which will not be affected by the Russian pull-out is the hockey team. Unlike in the Moscow Olympics, it will face a full-strength line-up at Los Angeles, and coach Balkishen said that the team had moved to a 4-2-3-1 formation, dropping the 5-3-2 formation. Vineet Kumar will play in the crucial position of sweeper back which, as Balkishen says, "is a pivotal position; the sweeper back must cover all the gaps in the field". As for the four forwards, mobility is the key—the Indians need all their speed on the fast synthetic surface.

Even as the sportsmen went through the throes of a pre-Olympic training spurt, the officials were going through their by now inevitable selection exercises. Olympian Milkha Singh walked out of a meeting held to nominate the manager and the coach of the athletics squad, saying that Chief Coach J.S. Saini should move over for somebody else and that manager-designate Verma was not an appropriate choice.

Another row broke out over the shooters, eight of whom were recommended for the games. It appeared that the selection committee had not stuck to the original qualifying marks laid down by the Indian Olympic Association—the gold medal performance at the last Asian Games or the sixth place at the Moscow Olympics—but had discounted the marks of eastern bloc shooters. If it had stuck to the original norms, only Randhir Singh—he shot 190 at the trial for the trap event, while the Asiad gold medal mark was 189—would have qualified.

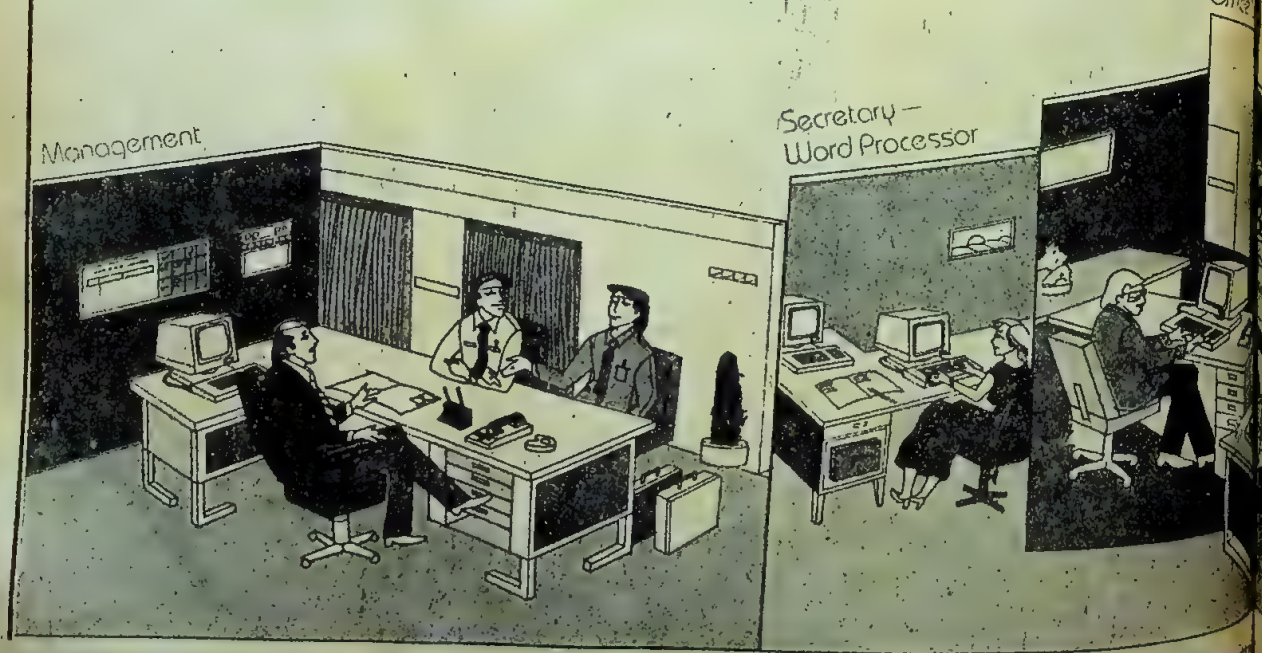
But the lion's share of confusion was reserved for the wrestlers. Wrestling is one of the sports where India is expected to make a mark at the Olympics, seeing that the Russians, the Bulgarians, and the Mongolians will not be there and, as a senior official commented wryly: "Everybody wants to go." In the end, the selection committee recommended eight grapplers, with five stand-bys. Few people were very enthusiastic about their prospects; says Chief Coach B.B. Bhagwat: "I wouldn't cheer because the Russians aren't coming. After all, the United States will be there, and so will Canada and Japan, and they're no pushovers."

The Indians may not get anywhere near the gold, the silver or the bronze in Los Angeles in August, but last fortnight's trials and tribulations made it clear that the enthusiasm to get out there and fly the flag was not lacking. Raja Bhalendra Singh, head of the Indian Olympic Association, perhaps put it best when he said, watching the athletes train at the sumptuous Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium: "Frankly I'm not too optimistic about our medal prospects at the games, apart from hockey. But isn't taking part what international sport is all about?"

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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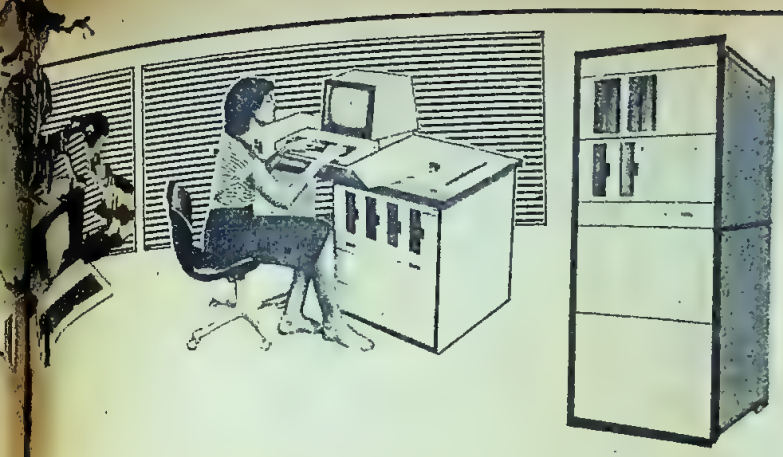


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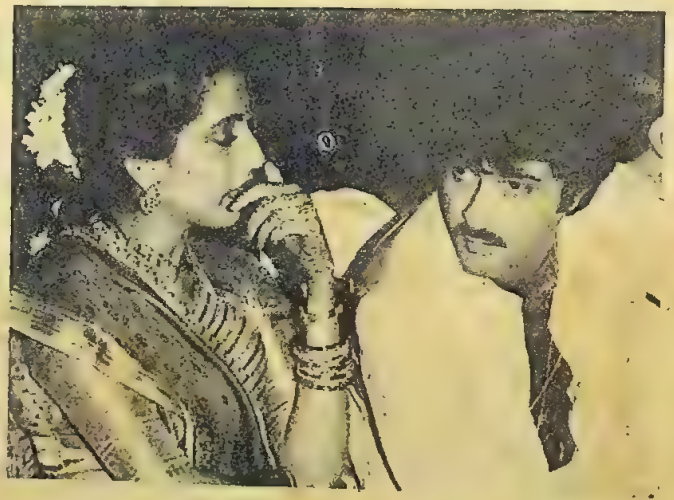
Studio Inspiration

■ Moscow took them to its heart, with tickets to their 10 performances going at prices 40 times the face value. Of course, they were tactful enough not to sing the sensitive *Rah Rah Rasputin/Russia's Greatest Love Machine*. But apart from that politic omission, the high selling pop group **Boney M** had the Russians begging for more and now they are preparing to take India by storm as well. Last fortnight, **Liz Mitchell, Marcia Barrett, Maizie Williams** and **Reggie Tsiboe** were in Delhi for a quick recce before their October 1984 sound and music bonanza—in six cities—goes on the road. They took in the sights of Delhi and met the press for lunch to tell everybody concerned that they would be back—with 20 tonnes of state-of-the-art equipment borrowed from brother group Pink Floyd, 30 technicians and the kind of words and tunes that have sold more than 100 million records and tapes world-wide.

■ The sons of film maestro Raj Kapoor may be going through a sticky patch careerwise but second cousin **Anil Kapoor**, son of producer Surinder Kapoor is doing just fine. His acting in both *Mashaal* and *Woh Saat Din* were commended by the critics and the glossies have started calling him the new James Dean. For the moment, however, Kapoor may be feeling just a little peeved about his trek to stardom because of what it has done to his married life, which began last month when he got quietly married to former model Sunita Bambani, sister of one-time Miss India Kavita Singh: the groom had little time to take off for a honeymoon and the bride had to see the sights of Europe escorted by a girlfriend. The actor, despite this momentary setback, does not feel that marriage will make any difference to his appeal with the audience. Said he: "Marriage affects s... actors. In any case... ference has it... ma... careers of ... Amitabh?" N... Kapoor K... sa... *Gaye*, by ... it... ar me... ...rtie...



Boney M: preparing for the October revolution



Anil Kapoor and Sunita: a quiet affair



Rekha with Rama Bans: mind and body culture

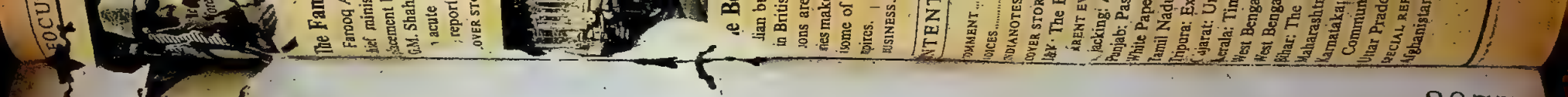
■ Everybody knew... a shapely figure but i... set to the classical si... Ravi Shankar does g... edge over others. La... night, actress **Rekha** b... India's most beautiful ... teacher and India's ans... Jane Fonda: a video cas... released by cbs for nat... and international distrib... shows the lady in the thro... various hathayoga as... even as Ravi Shankar sur... away in the background. ... cassette is the creation ... beautician **Rama Bans** ... simply took Jane Fonda ... her musical aerobic e... and gave them that in... twist of the mysterio... Rama's favourite ... pi... Sea Rock Club was gi... task of demonstrati... asanas for the video. ... spice to the poses, the lit... re accompanying the c... lists the actress' cand... fessions of the "most fr... ning experience: when m... ed one was in hospital" t... All of which should make ... a muscle-stretching work...

SIGN POSTS

■ **Awarded:** The Jna... award of 1983, to Kan... author Masti Venkatesh I... gar, 92, for his novel *... veera Rajendra*. Iyengar, p... larly known as Srinivasa, ... written 118 works.

■ **Died:** Nabakrushna ... oudhary, 83, Sarvodaya ... and former chief minister ... Orissa, of a heart att... Choudhary was chief mini... of Orissa from 1950 to 1... when he resigned to join ... Bhoodan movement. A c... associate of the late Jay... kash Narayan, he was ja... for 16 months during ... Emergency.





2080 2079 2078 2077



The Family Coup

Farooq Abdullah's dramatic dismissal as chief minister last fortnight and his replacement by arch rival and brother-in-law G.M. Shah has thrown Jammu & Kashmir in acute political instability. An on-the-spot report.

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Hijacking

The hijacking of an Indian Airlines airbus with 264 passengers and crew to Lahore added a bizarre twist to the Punjab saga. A key question remains unanswered: who were the hijackers? A detailed account of the episode and exclusive pictures.

CURRENT EVENTS 30



The Double Shuffle

Since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, little seems to have changed in that country. If anything, the Babrak Karmal Government is slowly succeeding in its attempts to convince the Afghans to accept the Soviets. An on-the-spot report.

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The Best Company

Indian businessmen are finally making it in British boardrooms. The new Indian lions are all British nationals and their ries make for fascinating reading. Profiles some of the leaders and their corporate mpires.

BUSINESS 97



A Scarred State

What was once an integrated and prosperous society in Punjab is now permanently scarred with the trauma of recent events. The communal divide has deepened after Operation Bluestar as a journey through the troubled state reveals.

SPECIAL FEATURE 120



The Renaissance Man

For the grand old man of Kannada literature, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, last fortnight's Jnanpith award comes in the twilight of a literary career that is virtually unmatched for its sheer scope and variety. A profile.

THE ARTS 150

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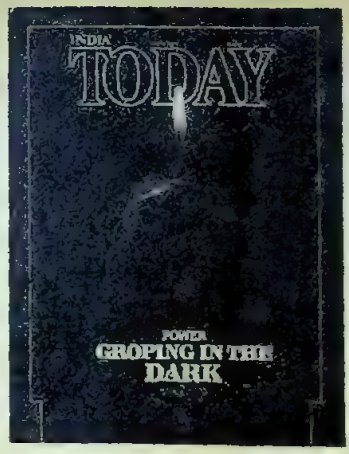
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POWER PROBLEMS

I read your illuminating and informative cover story ("Power: Groping in the Dark", July 15) by candlelight. Left to the tender mercies of the electricity supply board, I can only ask: "When will things become brighter?"

Meerut — RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

■ The Government monopoly in power generation has resulted in the present chaotic mess on the power front. If the Government allows the private sector to generate power as well, maybe the situation will get better. The heavy dependence on hydel projects and the mismanagement in power distribution has further made the situation worse.

Bangalore — RAMANAND SHARMA

■ After reading most of the magazine through, I settled down to read the cover story on power in the evening. And just when I was about to read the first paragraph, the electricity went off. After about 15 minutes, the lights came back and I resumed reading. But it seemed the powerhouse authorities were as determined to not let me read the article as I was determined to read it. The lights went off again. And so it happened at short intervals through the entire evening. The story obviously was amply demonstrated to me.

Allahabad — KANAK LATA

ZIA'S DENIAL

Your interview with Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq was interesting, (July 15). Although General Zia has said that he wants to build cordial relations with India and does not wish to interfere with the internal problems of the country, how can he ignore the fact that training camps for Sikh extremists have been operating in Pakistan and arms recovered from the Golden Temple bore Pakistani markings. Surely such things would have come to his notice earlier and if he so cared he would have arrested such activities.

Ludhiana — SANJAY CHOPRA

■ In one sense General Zia-ul-Haq's interview was pointless. On the one hand he says that "I am speaking to you from my heart" and then on the other hand he says he does not know anything about the CIA's involvement in Afghanistan. It is a well-known secret that the CIA uses Pakistan as a transit country to send arms to the Afghan Mujahedeen. If the General does not acknowledge this, then how is he going to tell us the whole truth?

Madras — RAJ SEKHAR RAO

BIASED REVIEW

With reference to your article on Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire* (July 15), I fully disagree with your correspondent that Ray has done nothing significant since *Shatranj ke Khilari* in 1977. Obviously he has considered *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, *Pikoo* and *Sadgati* to be bad films, but the pundits of the celluloid media were not diffident in regarding these films as masterpieces. It is true that these films did not win laurels abroad, but a knowledgeable cinema-goer should not consider those to be the only watermarks in a film's success. The review will prejudice people against the film.

Calcutta — S. ROY

NOVEL IDEA

I was elated to read about the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) in your issue (July 15). I would like to congratulate Sarvashree Gupta, Chauhan, Anil Sadgopal and everyone who contributed to the making of this programme. I sincerely hope that this idea catches on in other parts of the country and subjects like mathematics, chemistry and history are also dealt with in this manner. I would suggest the abolition of examinations to the HSTP people and let the students decide their area of specialisation according to how well they adapt to a particular subject.

Pune — GOPAL PARANJPE

DISGRACEFUL CRIME

I was shocked to read your report "Ungodly Crime" (July 15). Father Cherian is a wolf in shepherd's clothing. He is not only a disgrace to the orthodox church but to all Christians. He should be

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...diately removed from the vicarship ... banned from conducting services, ... being defended. I hope the ... church realise to what ... has set in, and take remedial ... before it is too late.

PHILIP MATHEW

PUNJAB AFTERMATH

I am sure nothing could have captured and conveyed the Sikh's religious and sentimental attachment to the Golden Temple more effectively than that picture of joyful Sikhs rushing towards the temple on the day it reopened, which appeared with the article "A State of Uncertainty" (July 15).

A.K. AGARWAL

■ Of late, from Operation Bluestar and Mrs Gandhi's subsequent appeal to apply a healing touch to the aggrieved Sikh community, the people have started believing that she first deliberately allowed the "cause" to aggravate and then crushed the "symptoms" ruthlessly, without trying to remove the cause, as a short cut to garner votes. If the healing touch has to be applied, then Mrs Gandhi should restore the confidence of the people in democracy by restoring a democratic electoral and administrative process right from inside her party.

Chandigarh — NIRVAIR SINGH

■ It did not behove of the President of India to have used the words, "To whom did you mortgage your eyes and ears all these days?" while addressing the former governor of Punjab B.D. Pande, in Amritsar. Giani Zail Singh should have addressed these words to the last two Congress chief ministers of Punjab, during whose regimes the so-called Sikh extremists were encouraged and financed to step up their activities with the known objective of embarrassing the Akalis.

Yavatmal — WARYAM SINGH

OPERATION SUCCESS

I would like to congratulate you on your coverage of the "Operation Bluestar" (June 30). As an army officer who had fought for the country in the same area in 1965, and one who has considered the army as the only true home for 23 years, I feel terribly let down that the police and other services who were to have contained the terrorists, have acted like keystone cops of yore and seem to have shown a clean pair of heels and a brown backside in the execution of their duties. I am proud of the army who have done their duty.

Bombay — MAJOR T.A. RAMAKRISHNAN

■ The cover story was indeed exhaustive, informative and balanced. There is no doubt that the sentiments of the Sikhs have been hurt. I can understand and appreciate their feelings. I can even understand Bhindranwale, a person who fought for the causes he espoused, rightly or wrongly. What, however, baffles me is the stand taken by some intellectuals like Khushwant Singh. Though Mr Singh never appeared to me and many others, as a very sincere person, I was rather surprised, to put it mildly, at his volte face. He reminds me of a phrase that I learnt at school: Hunting with the hounds and running with the hares!

Jamshedpur — NIRUPAM HALDAR

■ Operation Bluestar continues and so does the opposition to it. Not only are the terrorists still taking pot-shots at all sorts of persons—civilian and army alike—they are finding support in all corners of the country. Wherever there are Sikhs, they support the movement and soundly criticise the so-called desecration of their temple. Even the intelligentsia is not above it—note the reaction from Khuswant Singh. I remember when Bhindranwale started his murderous sorties from within the religious sanctuary, most Sikhs were up in arms against its misuse

Bombay — ABHAY KANOTRIA

FOREST IRE

In the issue of May 16-31, 1981, two articles entitled "Forests: Money on Trees" and "Karnataka: Losing Ground", were published. In the article "Money on Trees" it was stated that R.Y. Ghorpade, Congress(I) MP from Karnataka was linked with an alleged plot to denude timber worth over Rs 4 crore from the evergreen catchment area of the Cauvery river in Coorg. In the article "Losing Ground", it was stated that Gundu Rao's attempt to install Ghorpade, a former Swatantrite, involved in a major forest loot scandal backfired miserably.

On further enquiry, it is found that references made about R.Y. Ghorpade in the above articles were not justified. We regret the error. — *Editor*

NATIONALISED LOSS

Given the present regime's dogged support for the public sector ("Poor Performance", June 30), it is evident that public industry will continue to show losses in the foreseeable future if no corrective action is taken. The core industries in the public sector, such as coal, steel, oil and textiles ought to be denationalised and brought up-to-date with modern industry. A comprehensive overhaul of the public sector with the intention of ultimate denationalisation should be undertaken by the present government. Only then can India escape the vicious burden of a non-productive public sector. British socialism, on which Indian public sector institutions are based, must be uprooted from the Indian polity and economy. Perhaps a healthy dose of laissez faire economics can be substituted in its place, so that India can push ahead with its arduous task of economic development.

Bombay — KAMAL WADHWA

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD

This is with reference to your story on the Kesoram Rayon factory (June 30). There are countless instances of the Birlas, who have a large share in the industrial development of the country, causing havoc in the living conditions of their employees and their total disregard for the environmental conditions around their factories. One can understand the political links these industrialists have with the political circles governing the administration, and at the same time one wonders how these men lack the knowledge of the basic environmental factors required for the continuity of life.

Maharashtra — S. KANNAN

COMPUTER SCHOOLS

The article on computer education, (June 30), was timely. I agree with your inference about the reason for a low level of proficiency of the graduates coming out of these mushrooming institutions, due to the lack of practicals for want of computer time. Being a computer professional, I know how these private computer training schools charge a phenomenal amount per student for a three-month long programme and take them down to a computer installation centre just once, and that too for just half an hour. This is because computer time costs money and these institutions have opened up shops to mint money. But any computer expert will agree that learning computer programming without running it on computers is like learning to swim without getting into the water.

Calcutta — SUBIR K. LAHIRI

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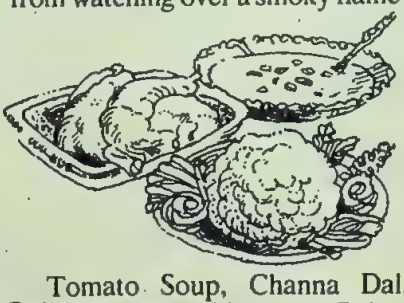
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Crumbling Norms

MUCH of the immediate news in recent weeks has caused both concern and anxiety about the direction in which the country is headed. The creation of communal divides in Punjab and Bombay, the methods by which state governments have been brought down in Sikkim and Jammu & Kashmir, the increasing need to call out the army to bring inflammable situations under control, the fresh wave of agitation in Assam and renewed insurgency in Tripura: all these raise fundamental questions concerning the health of the body politic. For why should the army have to be called in to do the job of policemen, or governors start acting as supra-chief ministers?



Important as these immediate questions are, there are other signs of trouble that do not make it to the headlines but which are as significant in pointing to a society that is losing its sense of order, of flouting the basic norms on which civilisations flourish. And the best set of examples is provided by the confusion of roles in a host of areas. If soldiers have become policemen, policemen have become vice-chancellors in several universities. Politicians in an increasingly corrupt system have started to become businessmen, obsessed with making money on deals, while religious leaders become political forces. A swami runs a gun factory, the Supreme Court has to supervise the functioning of jails, businessmen try to become politicians, and presidential ordinances substitute for legislative action.

Any civilised society rests on the assumption that its fundamental institutions will function normally. But increasingly, India's institutions present a picture of growing confusion, or quite simply fail to function. A police force that is supposed to protect the citizenry fails to do so, and all too often resembles a group whom society has to beware of. Government departments fail to administer as they should because the politician and civil servant have changed places. Instead of the minister laying down policy and the bureaucrat administering it, it is now a case of the bureaucrat laying down ineffectual policies while the minister wants to deal with the individual cases—for a consideration.

The decay stretches from institutions to the professions, many of which have been reduced to money-grubbing trades devoid of the code of ethics that gives a professional a superior status to that of a tradesman. Doctors are interested not in the patient's pulse but his purse; educational institutions become entrepreneurial teaching shops where the ruling deity is not Saraswati but Lakshmi; your lawyer can't be trusted because he may have been paid off by his counterpart on the other side; your architect may be in league with the building contractor.

On all these fronts, the picture is not one of progress but of regression. There is almost no institution of society that is stronger today than it was 30 years ago. And the country itself, instead of jelling together as a nation, is getting torn apart by sectarian loyalties. Indeed, if the ultimate test of a democratic polity is the manner in which it registers dissent, and deals with dissent, there must be worry and anxiety at the sight of hijackings and of chief ministers using a planners' meeting to register political protest through a walk-out.

Each of the symptoms that cause worry has a specific cause, and a specific remedy. But there are also broader explanations and trends. At the top, there is the easy willingness to bend norms and institutions to fit passing circumstance: if a chief minister is out of favour, use the governor to oust him. At another level, the system is groaning under the sheer weight of numbers: there are too many litigants, too many students, too many unemployed. There are also, quite simply, too many laws trying to regulate a people who will not obey even traffic rules. And at yet another level, the entire underpinning of rewards and punishments essential to any orderly system of human endeavour has broken down. There is no penalty in government offices for not working, or for being corrupt, and no premium placed on carrying out your functions as efficiently and honestly as possible. It is often far easier to give in: to wink at arms being smuggled into the Golden Temple because otherwise Bhindranwale might put you on his hit list; to promote all the students in a class because otherwise the teacher might have to explain the high rate of failures.

Yet, none of this need be the case. This country had (and perhaps still has) among the finest institutions to be found anywhere in the Third World whether administrative, judicial, educational or political. It has an intelligent people who display a capacity for hard work when given the right environment, as Indians abroad constantly testify through their success stories. It has an enterprising business class, enormous natural resources, and a general degree of tolerance that should be of immense help in welding the nation together. But instead of using these invaluable assets to move forward, and to tackle the admittedly difficult task of nation-building, the country seems intent on frittering everything away in the course of a slow slide into chaos. The slide can still be arrested; but for that there has to be the firm will to make things work, to make the institutions play their proper role, to not bend norms in order to fit immediate whims or convenience.

In a society that perceives the decay as having set in at the top, the lead for setting a new tone to national endeavour must also come from the top. In the absence of that, however, the task cannot be allowed to go by default, and decision-makers lower down must assume responsibility for stopping the rot.

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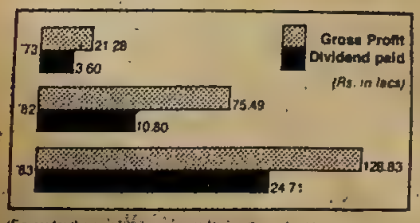
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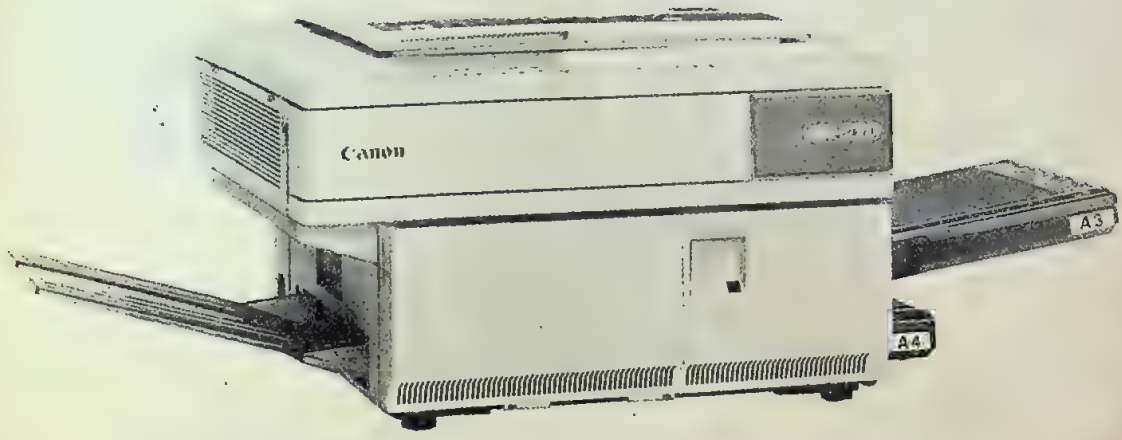
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● *I am convinced that Mrs Gandhi utilised the presence of Bhindranwale and his goons in the Akal Takht to give the Sikhs a bloody punch on the nose.*
■ KHUSHWANT SINGH *in The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *My love for Mrs Gandhi is the love that exists between a sadhu and a prime minister. I am her son . . . Mrs Gandhi has a lot of love and respect for me.*
■ SWAMI SADACHARI *in Gentleman*

● *He (Dr J.S. Chauhan) has made this more like political acrobatics. Sometimes he takes out passports, sometimes announces governments, sometimes he goes to Pakistan. People are not taking him seriously.*
■ GURCHARAN SINGH KHALSA
president, International Supreme Council of Sikhs, in London

● *I am not indulging in fascism. I do not want riots . . . I have never propagated fascism but if there is anarchy and the military takes over then fascism would become a reality.*
■ BAL THACKERAY *in The Telegraph*

● *We have been mortally afraid of becoming a police state. Instead we have become a* vakeel *civilisation.*
■ K.F. RUSTAMJI *in the Indian Express*

● *They (V.S. Naipaul's books) are deeply thoughtful and intensely felt. But I think this emotional intensity has exhausted itself and is turning into an attitude now, a rather tired and predictable one.*
■ ANITA DESAI *in Imprint*

● *Earlier a Brahmin's wife was just a wife. Today, an executive's wife is expected to promote him, to host parties, to cultivate social graces. A disco-virgin is what the market demands today.*
■ AYESHA KAGAL *in the Times of India*

● *Just pay a journalist five thousand rupees and tell him to write, you've acted well. Do it. Change your image.*
■ SMITA PATIL *to Poonam Dhillon in Stardust*

● *In the hands of a great director, Amitabh Bachchan could be one of the finest actors anywhere — Belmondo and Brando rolled into one!*
■ ARUNA VASUDEV *in The Hindustan Times*

● *I don't approve of it (nudity on screen) at all . . . I am very happy I am an Indian actress working in Indian films. Because you can't make films with frontal nudity and all that . . .*
■ ZEENAT AMAN *in The Sunday Observer*

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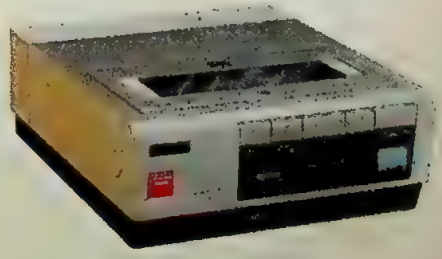
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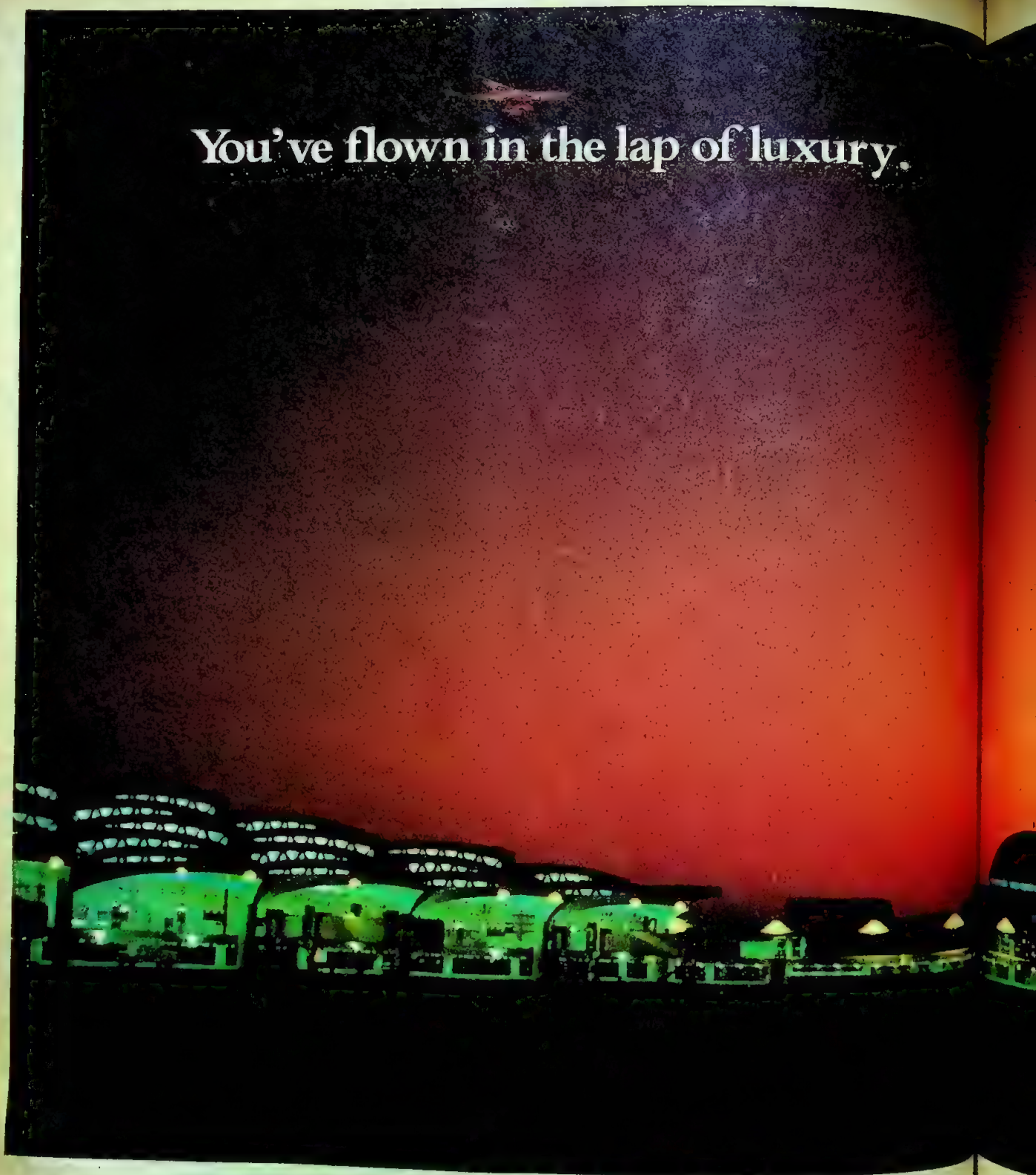
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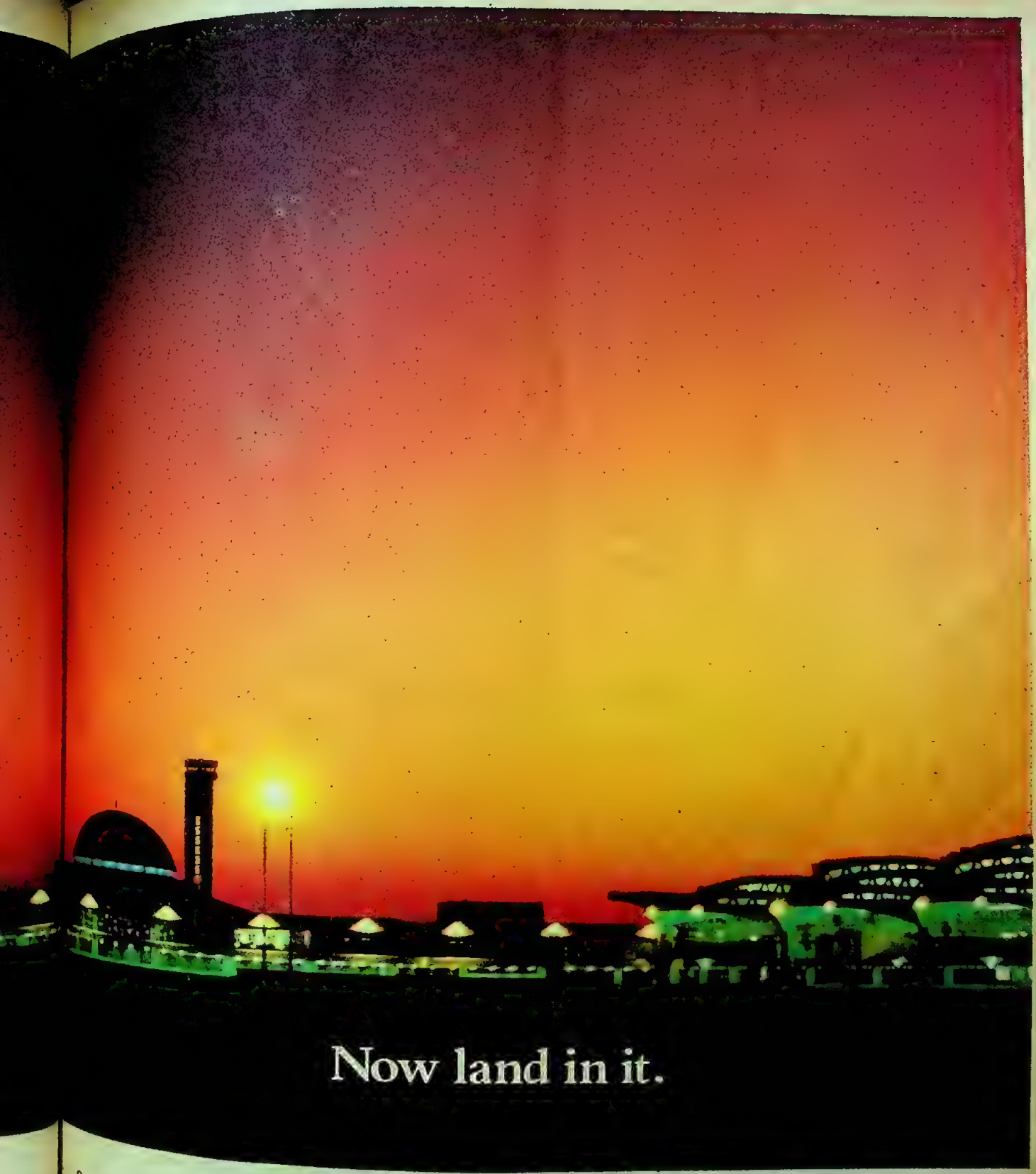
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OPEN HOUSE



■ "Walk into my parlour." No, that's not the spider making his customary invitation to the customary unsuspecting fly. That's a minister talking and he's not saying it to his chief minister or to the leader of the dissidents; he's saying it to the general public who put him where he is.

This unusual politician is Karnataka Law and Public Grievances Minister A. Lakshmisagar who last month opened the doors of his office in the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore wide open and declared pretty firmly that from now on they were going to stay like that. He also evicted his peon from his stool outside his door to ensure that the last obstacle to the sanctum sanctorum was removed.

Now anybody can go and see him any time they like, which does make for a more than slightly crowded schedule, but, as the innovative minister puts it: "The closed doors and peons were symbols of authority and a decadent bureaucracy that has caused revulsion in the minds of the public. People must feel free to see me at any time without such hindrances." Hear, hear.

FAMILY PLOT

■ The family that prays together stays together. Hasn't that how it has always been and always will be? Well, a family in Sangareddy in Andhra Pradesh has added a twist to this piece of sensible advice which will no doubt get the approval of like-minded families elsewhere in India.

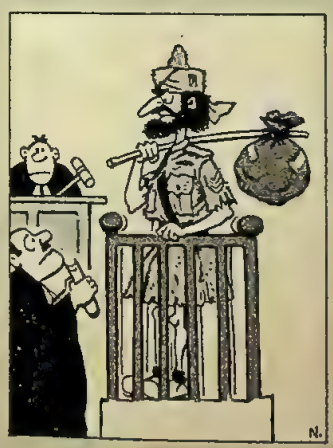


There was once—there might still be, for all anyone knows—a cooperative society in Sangareddy. It was formed about six years ago and, as most cooperative societies do, it went *topi* in hand to all the financial agencies it could find and collected a lot of money for its activities. The total amount it put together was Rs 8 lakh. Then it vanished.

When officials from the financial agencies who had so obligingly filled that innocent *topi* with Rs 8 lakh went around to find out what the society was doing with the money they reportedly found only a forwarding address: 'Club Whoopee, Brazil'. It was also revealed that all the members of the society belonged to just one family which, as anybody will admit, is a very neat little trick to keep the home fires burning very nicely.

DELAYED JUSTICE

■ Everyone has heard the story of Rip Van Winkle who grabbed many many times 40 winks to create what is probably the best advertisement ever for the Sleeping Pill that Knocks You Out for Ever and Ever. The Madras High Court last fortnight evoked the name of the great pioneer to point out to a petitioner that he should step lively next time.



"Like Rip Van Winkle, going to sleep for a long spell and then waking up," was how Justice S. Natarajan put it and it seems he had some justification for the comment. The petitioner was a policeman who had been sacked from the service in April 1962 after an inquiry into a charge of bribery. The policeman filed the petition two years ago and the reason he gave for the delay was that he had been asking the authorities between 1962 and 1970 to consider his case; then, for eight years until 1978 he was bedridden with illness. Finally, four years after he was cured, he filed his petition.

No go. The judge dismissed the policeman's prayer that the two decades be treated as 'on duty' and that he be given his salary and benefits for the period and the petitioner returned home a sadder but wiser ex-policeman.

REVERSE DRIVE

■ When G.V. Rama Rao of Kevvur in Andhra Pradesh was asked to chauffeur a transport corporation bus, he refused. Which was quite an unusual thing for Rama Rao to do, seeing as he has been driving a bus for quite some time now and indeed is paid for what must be a very monotonous job. This time round, however, he broke with convention, tucked his hands in his pockets, and stood by silently while his superiors ordered and cajoled him to get behind the wheel and get going.



Being an amiable sort of fellow, Rama Rao got going, though not quite in the direction his officers wanted. He drove the bus to a police station and handed it over to a sub-inspector, saying that the brakes were defective and that therefore, he had no right to endanger the lives of his passengers He also said that he had asked the corporation in writing to get the bus thoroughly checked before putting it on the road. As they hadn't done so, he had been compelled to drive to the police. The police have driven the bus back to the depot, and Rama Rao is still standing by strongly and silently, the last of a vanishing breed of careful and concerned bus drivers.

–Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

The Family Coup

I AM SATISFIED that you have lost confidence of the majority of the MLA*'s in the Legislative Assembly. I, therefore, regret to inform you that I have dismissed you from the chief ministership of the state and dissolved the council of ministers headed by you.*

—Jammu & Kashmir Governor Jagmohan to Farooq Abdullah on July 2, 1984



HIS SACK was inevitable. And when it came, it had all the drama of well-planned political conspiracy carried out with perfect precision. When a cavalcade of cars whizzed through Srinagar's tree-lined Gupkar Road to Raj Bhavan, past his home, Farooq Abdullah, the flamboyant chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir, was oblivious of its ominous intent. While Governor Jagmohan, Mrs Gandhi's man Friday was closeted with legislators, Farooq was having tea with his wife Molly. He had barely put down his cup when the phone rang. The governor wanted to see him immediately. After a quick bath, Farooq drove down to Raj Bhavan where Jagmohan sprang his surprise, handing him a terse 250-word letter. Its contents were clear and to the point: the chief minister had lost majority support in the Assembly and had forfeited the right to continue as head of the state Government. The letter apart, Farooq was shocked to notice the presence of Gulam Mohammed Shah—his 64-year-old estranged brother-in-law—at the governor's mansion along with 12 other important National Conference (NC) MLA's.

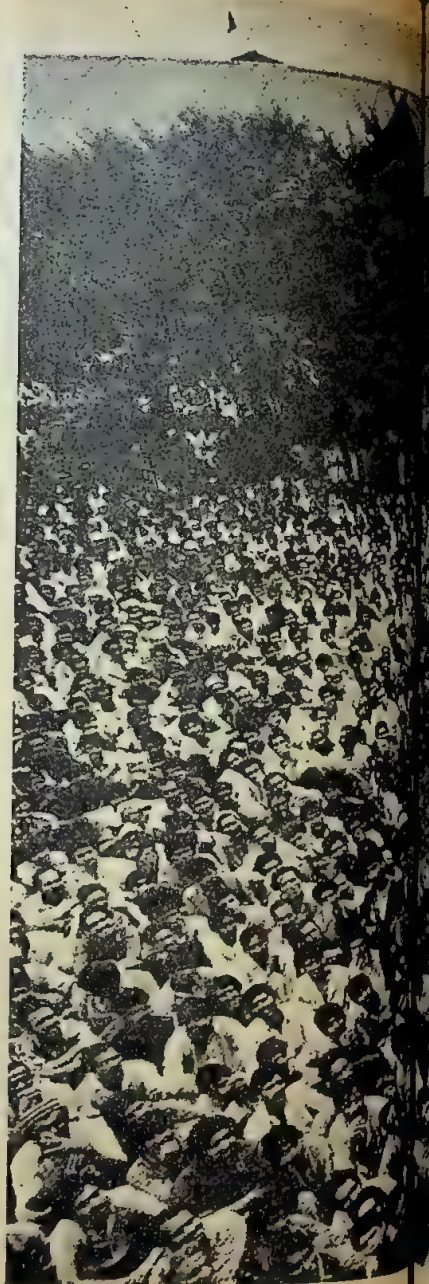
Farooq couldn't contain himself. According to Raj Bhavan sources, his face fell and he thumped the table angrily, telling Jagmohan: "Do what you like but don't let that man become chief minister," gesticulating in the direction of where Shah was sitting in another room.

The die had been cast. Farooq was betrayed by those who had hallelujahed him only 24 hours earlier. The betrayal was sudden, a blow from a group of legislators who hadn't ever got used to the fact that they had been denied ministerial berths—and had been promised these coveted jobs by Shah. In the process, Farooq's 46-member legislature party had reduced to a minority group of 34 in the 78 member house, and Shah with the support of the 26 Congress(I) members was in the driver's seat. He was sworn in as chief minister on July 2, along with 14 others as cabinet ministers.

The drama on July 2 was the latest, and the most spectacular round in a family feud which had begun in the last year of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's life. On the face of it, therefore, the change-over from one chief minister to another was democratic but the pattern was entirely Mughal, with powerful family chieftains arraigned against each other. Farooq won the first round in 1982 when the Sheikh died because his mother sided with him. Now it was Shah's turn, as he outflanked Farooq with Congress(I) help. Khalida Shah, 50, leader of the parallel NC and Farooq's sister said forcefully after her husband and his Cabinet were sworn in: "My brother had lost the moral support of the people. His ouster will mark the beginning of a stable and clean administration in the state. Barring a few noises, the state is happy with the smooth change-over."

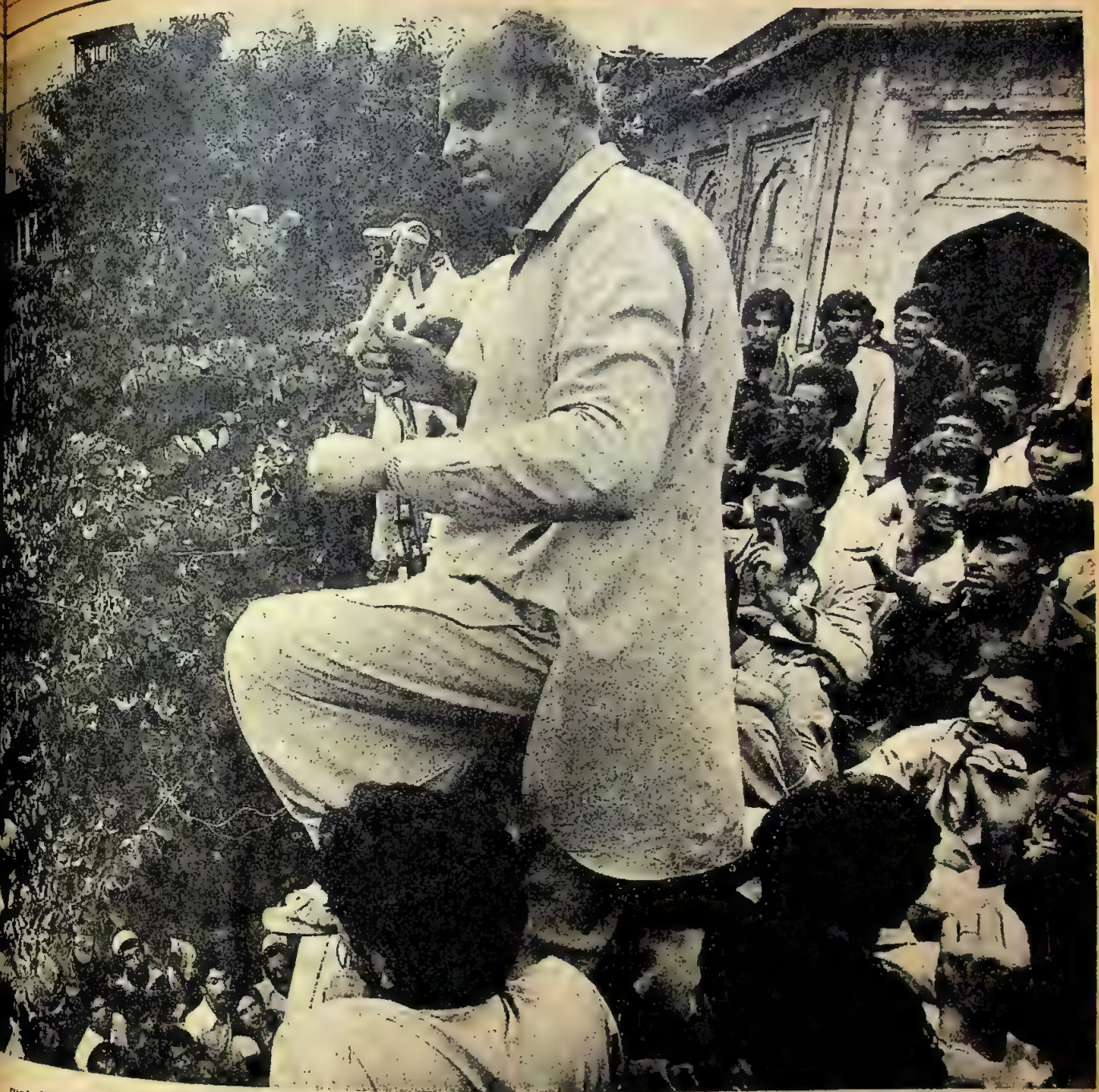
SHE WAS more than slightly off the mark. The "few noises" she dismisses contemptuously were actually a massive clamour of protest. For a full week after the ouster not a single shop opened for business in Srinagar. The authorities moved in with an indefinite curfew to keep irate and potentially violent mobs indoors. Farooq himself stayed indoors for the first 24 hours fearing that his presence would worsen things. Even so, over 2,000 people spurned curfew restrictions to crowd Farooq's residence and express solidarity with the deposed leader. The slogans that rent the air weren't very flattering to the new-born regime: "*Gul Shah—Chor Shah*", "*Marqazi Sarkar Murdabad*" (Down with the Central Government) and "*Indira Gandhi Murdabad*". Police had to fire tear gas shells and bullets to clear the area. As Farooq asked sarcastically: "Where is their mass support? Here is a chief minister who can't move without gun-toting cops in a city which he claims is his."

The shrewd administrator Jagmohan had ordered an elaborate security bandobast before inviting Shah to take over as chief minister. Soon after midnight on July 1, when he was informed of the defections, the governor requisitioned over 2,000 armed men from the Border Security Force (BSF), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and other paramilitary units and even alerted the army. In fact, the swift and efficient dispatch of forces from faraway places such as Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to Srinagar was clear evidence that the Centre was taking more than routine interest in the whole exercise. Indian Airlines obligingly dis-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAGHU RAI

Farooq addressing a mammoth meeting in Srinagar three days after his ouster



rupted its schedules and ferried in the troops in four Airbuses and two Boeings.

The airlift evoked memories of another toppling exercise 31 years ago when Sheikh Abdullah had been arrested after his ouster as prime minister of the state and 20 people were killed in the violent protests that followed. Explained P.L. Handoo, former law minister in Farooq's cabinet: "The Congress party committed a similar fraud on Kashmir in 1953, but they paid a heavy price for it and ultimately brought Sheikh Saheb back to the valley to keep the state under control. By dismissing his son they have created similar instability and chaos in the state."

With the NC split providing a cover, no one in the Congress(I) was willing to admit to a Central hand in the toppling operation. Yet it was clear that the high command had acted for a variety of reasons. Mrs Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv have never forgiven Farooq for not falling in line with them at the last elections when he stormed his way to power over the ruins of the Congress(I) in the valley, talks about an alliance having rudely broken down only days earlier. Nor has the Centre been particularly approving of Farooq's efforts to acquire a national political role. Like his father before him, Farooq was able to provide a stable government with the solid backing of 46 members in the 78-member state Assembly. But unlike his father, Farooq was never content to be walled in by the Banihal pass. The Sheikh was essentially a Kashmir leader and happy to be one, keeping the state firmly within the Indian orbit but keeping alive its urge for a unique identity. Farooq did that, of course, but to his credit preferred to see himself as a national leader eager to immerse his state in the national mainstream. Said the Janata Party's Syed Mir Qasim: "Farooq represented those forces for whom Kashmir's merger with India was not negotiable. But this hijacking of the peo-



ple's government will reverse the process of normalisation."

More than Mrs Gandhi, her closest advisors on Kashmir affairs were eager to displace the Farooq government. Having been sold the far-fetched line that the Congress(I) would have emerged victorious in last year's elections had it not been for the rigging of the elections, these advisors saw a moral righteousness in their case for dismissing Farooq. After all, they could list several instances in which the Farooq administration turned a blind eye to demonstrations of pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian sentiment in the valley, quite forgetting that such exhibition has never been uncommon in Kashmir. Finally, they could never stomach the alliance that Farooq hastily forged with Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq, leader of the Awami Action Committee, whose politics have long been suspect in New Delhi's eyes. Farooq's ignominous ouster has undoubtedly flung the state back into political uncertainty, but his



Supporters garland Shah after his swearing-in; and (below) Khalida

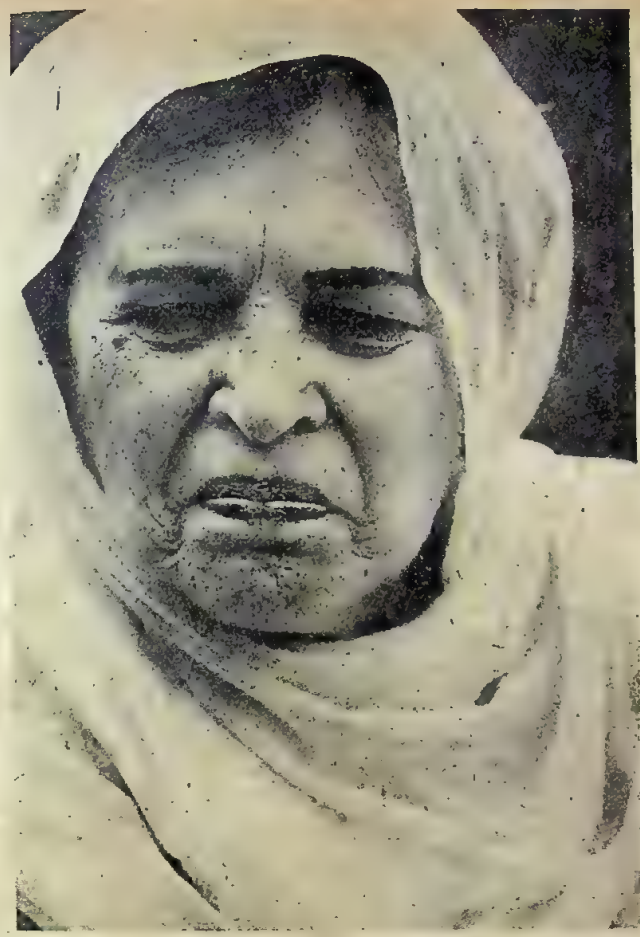
efforts to be nationally recognised has yielded handsome dividends. He has received solid support from the entire national opposition. Surprisingly, even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for which Farooq was anathema, adopted a resolution condemning Governor Jagmohan for imposing a 'rump government' on the state. In another unprecedented move, BJP President Atal Behari Vajpayee moved a resolution in the Home Ministry's parliamentary consultative committee meeting demanding Jagmohan's recall. The West Bengal Cabinet fulminated against an action installing a government of "stooges and defectors". The constituents of the United Front dispatched a six-member delegation including, among others, front leader, I.K. Gujral and West Bengal Finance Minister Ashok Mitra to Srinagar to convey to Farooq their unequivocal and total support.

At last week's meeting of opposition parties, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao said: "The patently indefensible action of the governor of Jammu & Kashmir is an effront to the dignity and self-respect of any popular government, and history will not forgive us if we fail to fight and overcome the forces behind such an act."

Farooq's reaction to this show of solidarity was typical: in speech after speech, he expressed his gratitude for the Opposition's support and reminded his audiences that the rest of the country was with them—in sharp contrast with the sentiments his father evoked. Addressing a huge public gathering in Mujahid Manzil on July 5 the NC's double-storeyed wooden structure in old Srinagar, he roared: "We are not alone in this hour of grief of the Kashmiri people. We have the entire nation behind us." The crowd responded enthusiastically: "*Muslim Hindu bhai bhai, Indira Gandhi hai hai.*" His otherwise well-attended meetings in the old city were, however, marred by a few pro-Pakistan slogans, upon which Farooq thrashed the sloganeers with sticks and chappals.

Accompanied by his mother Begum Abdullah, Farooq roamed through half the valley in his Matador. At her first public meeting in Pompore, a tiny hamlet 15 km from Srinagar, the Begum declared: "Nobody can rule over you from outside. The Congress(I) has been able to install a puppet government with a few *quami gaddars* (traitor) but their rule will not last long."

The virtual coup d'etat was being challenged at other levels. Farooq's supporters maintained that under the state's anti-defection legislation, the 12 defecting MLA's had lost the right to vote in the Assembly and their support to the new government was meaningless. Farooq wrote to the speaker requesting him to refer the cases of the 12 to the high court for legal opinion. Says Sheikh Nazir, NC general secretary: "Our act is quite clear. If a member defects and defies the party whip, he automatically loses assembly membership. Shah and his supporters argue that they have neither defied any whip nor defected; says the new chief minister: "Ours is the real National Conference and Farooq has been expelled from this organisation. We have the majority



Begum Abdullah: powerful force

support of the district and block level officers who were members of the national council nominated by Sheikh Saheb.

THE QUESTION which is the real NC is yet to be settled. But Jagmohan is also being accused of violating the state's Constitution by not accepting Farooq's advice on dissolution. Section 92 clearly and specifically states that the governor is bound by the chief minister's advice. Farooq and other opposition leaders cite the precedent of former governor L.K. Jha who dissolved the Assembly when the Congress(I) withdrew its support to the Sheikh's ministry. Congress(I) leaders argue that Jagmohan was not bound to accept the advice of a chief minister who had lost his majority, and, moreover, a rival group with absolute majority had staked its claim.

Countering opposition charges about his "unconstitutional" action, Jagmohan said that Charan Singh had been sworn in as prime minister by Sanjiva Reddy without physical verification of his majority. Singh had not given any written assurance that he would prove his majority on the floor of the House, but Shah was given a month's deadline to do so. State Finance Minister D.D.Thakur, a lawyer in his own right, justified Jagmohan's action: "Everything has been done within the constitutional framework. If we don't prove our majority we will go to the people and will not look for legal lacunae to remain in power."

Operation Topple was inaugurated on June 28 when the would-be deserters gathered in the rooms of the newly-opened five-star Centaur hotel on Id eve. The venue and timing were significant: a gathering of this kind would not be considered unusual on Id and would not arouse Farooq's suspicions. To further camouflage their intentions, the dissidents went and greeted an unsuspecting Farooq before getting down to business. That very day, a letter was drafted and signed by 10 of the 12 MLA's informing the governor of their decision to withdraw support. Earlier on June 23, Mufti Mohammed Sayed, state Congress(I) chief, had been summoned to Delhi and ordered to support a dissident government headed by Shah—should it come into being. And Jagmohan had spent three days in the capital discussing extremism in the state—but was undoubtedly sounded out on how to handle possible changes.

With the ball set in motion, the dissidents were taken in three groups to different hide-outs in the city by Shah's 28-year-old son Muzaffer, while Shah closeted himself at home and his top advisors Thakur and M.N. Kochak—both former ministers in the Sheikh's cabinet—moved off to Pahalgam, ostensibly on a fishing holiday.

Blissfully unaware of these moves, Farooq was business as usual. On Id he played a leisurely round of golf, and on July 1, when the drama was reaching a climax, he had gone some 60 km on a motor cycle to personally take by surprise and apprehend timber smugglers. The next day he was scheduled to make a political visit to Jammu.

The conspirators, meanwhile, lay low for 36 hours, and on the evening of July 1 they assembled in the home of a friendly industrialist from where, at 11.15 p.m., Shah telephoned Jagmohan to announce that he would like to present 12 MLA's who had withdrawn support from the Farooq ministry. Shah later admit-

ted: "We wanted to go through with it as quickly as possible to avoid any possible leaks."

Jagmohan advised Shah to wait until morning as he would not want to do anything "during the dark hours". He was in fact buying time to consult the Centre. In the next six hours, Jagmohan not only obtained the green signal from New Delhi but arranged the airlifting of the paramilitary forces.

Shah and his 12 MLA's and two MLC's arrived in four cars at Raj Bhavan the next morning at 5.15 a.m. The BSF had already taken position at strategic points in the city. The army was kept on alert and Lt-General Hoon, corps commander in Kashmir, was requested to be available for consultation. When Shah handed over the June 28 letter, Jagmohan wanted a fresh one signed by the legislators in his presence. Another letter was hurriedly written confirming withdrawal of their support and they willingly signed.

Ali Mohammed Naik, an independent MLA, handed a separate letter pledging his support to Shah. Even as Jagmohan was questioning the MLA's, Maulvi Iftikar Hussain Ansari, leader of the 26-member Congress(I) group, arrived and handed over another letter assuring his party's unconditional support to Shah. Ansari later remarked: "Our only objective was to get rid of this anti-national and communal government. We are not interested in power at the moment." He remained with the 12 NC legislators who were unwilling to leave Raj Bhavan because they feared reprisals from Farooq supporters.

JAGMOHAN summoned Farooq at 7.15 a.m., handed him a photocopy of the letter and asked for his resignation in writing. Jagmohan's letter read: "Thirteen MLA's of the Legislative Assembly of Jammu & Kashmir have approached me in person this morning. They told me and have given in writing that they have withdrawn their support to your government and pledge their support to G.M. Shah, MLC ... I am satisfied that you no longer enjoy the majority support of the Assembly and have, therefore, forfeited the right to continue as chief minister and to head the Government. In these circumstances I advice you to submit your resignation as chief minister forthwith." Taken unawares, Farooq was dumbfounded. He then asked Jagmohan for time to consult with his colleagues. Before making his way out, he did however discuss the possibility of the imposition of governor's rule.

Returning home Farooq summoned cabinet colleagues and party functionaries. Two hours later he sent Jagmohan a long letter advising him to call the Assembly so that he could prove his majority. In it Farooq maintained that the 13 defectors had lost the right to vote. He asserted: "I, therefore, reiterate that the Assembly be summoned forthwith so that on my failure to demonstrate confidence of the House, we can next consider the options available to us under the Constitution of the state. If, however, you do not want conform to this democratic method, I on behalf of my cabinet would request you to accept our advice of dissolving the Legislative Assembly so that we can go back to our people."

But both the Centre and Jagmohan had made up their minds. Soon after the paramilitary forces arrived in Srinagar and were dispatched to potential trouble spots, Jagmohan served the letter of dismissal on Farooq and invited Shah to take over. At 5.30 that evening, while Farooq fumed in rage at home, his elder sister Khalida and younger brother Tariq led a crowd of 200 to Raj Bhavan to hail the new chief minister. All the dissidents were sworn in as ministers. The insidious family plot aimed at toppling the heir to Sher-e-Kashmir, conceived as far back as December 1983, had finally paid off.

For Shah, the Congress(I)'s backing was crucial. Though he denies meeting the Central leadership, Kochak and Thakur are now known to have secretly flown to Delhi more than a dozen times to confer with top Central leaders. Congress(I) leaders involved in the operation were Arun Nehru and Murli Bhandare MP's, Union Deputy Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and AICC(I) General Secretary Rajendra Kumari Bajpayee. Bhandare and Azad made several trips to Srinagar between January and May looking for opportunities and making assessments.

The seeds for a vertical split in the NC were sown in December 1983 when Khalida and Shah started their own NC. Shah then came to New Delhi, visiting important Congress(I) leaders including the prime minister. Shah claims that he had mustered the support of six MLA's in December but had allowed them to remain in the NC. In March 1984, their number rose to 10. But when the then governor B.K. Nehru was approached for Farooq's ouster, he directed them to try their luck in the Assembly which was to meet in Jammu a month later. Between March and April, Shah tried three times to assemble the 12 MLA's and stage the family coup. Claims his son Muzaffar:



Army personnel patrolling old Srinagar city during curfew

"We tried for two consecutive days in April but somehow it didn't click. At one point we had the support of 21 MLA's but all of them didn't turn up at a fixed place and time."

When Farooq got wind of the toppling game, he made his ministers specifically check out possible defectors. The feud reached its climax on April 24 when Khalida was brutally attacked by NC sup-



porters as she was proceeding to address a public meeting at Beehama, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Ganderbal town. Said Thakur: "The Ganderbal incident will go down in Kashmir's history as a place where the evil forces representing Farooq had their first and last bloody encounter. It proved his Waterloo in Kashmir politics."

The dissidents planned to overcome the disqualification hurdle by splitting the party and claiming that their group was the real NC. On May 23, therefore, Khalida and Shah summoned a delegate session in which "2,400 of the 3,800 delegates" were present. The delegates elected Khalida president, "expelled" Farooq and authorised Khalida to take appropriate steps for his dethronement as leader. Husband and wife addressed over a hundred public and party meetings, forging contacts with the dissidents. Says Khalida: "It was really an uphill task for us, with hired goondas and state intelligence sleuths chasing us every day. But we wanted to prove that no amount of coercion and allurement would save Farooq's chief ministership."

The Congress(I) did its best to help. Its hordes picketed courts, blocked roads, torched buses and houses and provoked police firings in which over a dozen people were killed from October 1983 to February 1984.

Union ministers like Azad and Mohammed Arif Khan obligingly submitted a memorandum to President Zail Singh demanding Central intervention because law and order had broken down. The

campaign culminated in an AICC(I) pamphlet rousingly titled *The Challenge in Kashmir* which made scathing attacks on Farooq, but was soon withdrawn from circulation. It pointed to the state government's alleged links with communal organisations and concluded: "Congressmen in the state are looking to the Central leadership to deal with the situation as it deems fit to prevent it from deteriorating further."

Particularly serious was the charge that over 600 Sikh youths had received combat training at six *gurmat* camps of the banned All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) in the state. Intelligence agencies said that of the eight other *gurmat* camps, two were held in Himachal Pradesh and the rest in Punjab. The star speaker at these camps was Bhai Amrik Singh, a militant AISSF leader. In the winter session of Parliament, Congress(I) MP's attacked Farooq's government for allowing the camps. Farooq maintains that the camps were religious rather than military. Says he: "Of course some camps were held in Jammu but there was nothing unusual about them. They were like any other training camps organised by other religious or political groups. But do I have to be sacked for these camps? Then they should also dismiss the Himachal Pradesh Government." Interestingly enough, Home Minister P.C. Sethi also told Parliament the same thing, that the camps were religious in nature.

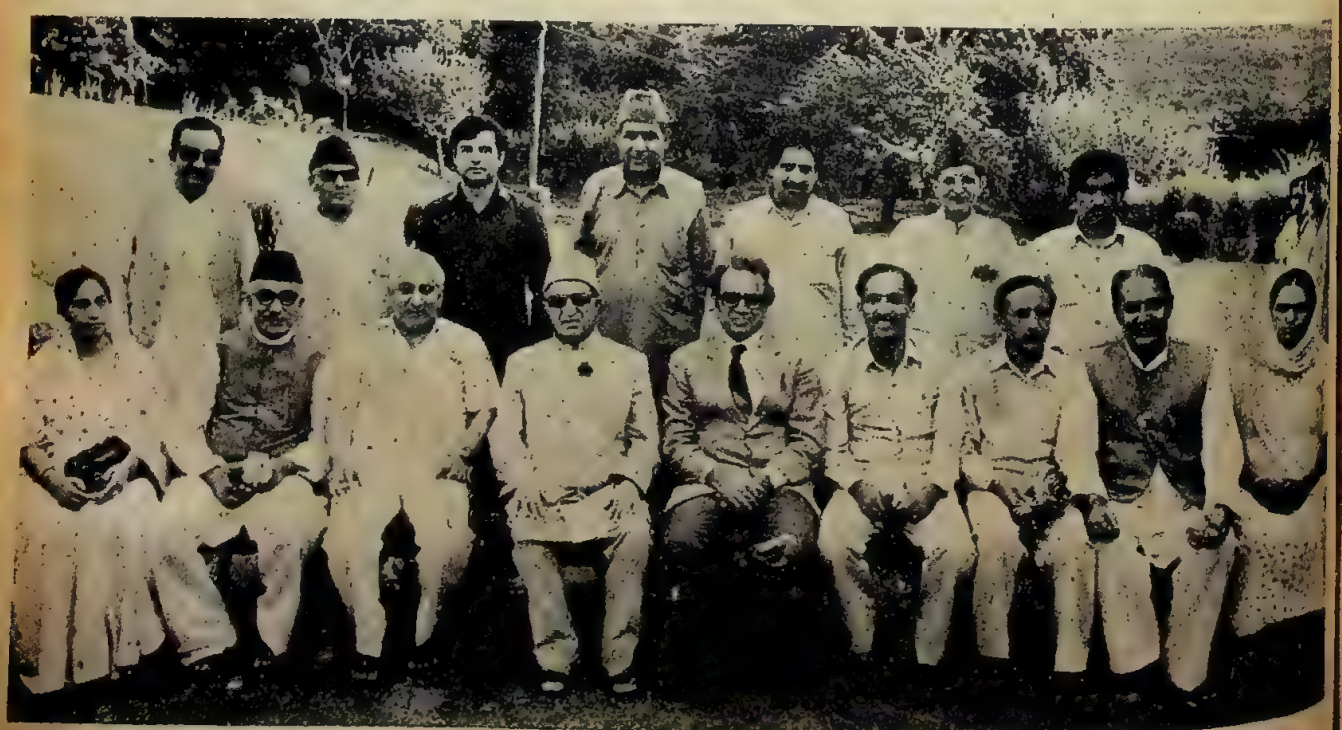
Yet the Congress(I)'s tirades against Farooq continued through the year, at the party's plenary session in Calcutta, in parliamentary debates, and at the public meetings, demonstrations and dharnas organised by over one dozen Central ministers who visited the valley between December 1983 and June 1984. The Central Government kept up the pressure with angry letters demanding that the state Government act against communal and pro-Pakistan elements. In February, Sethi wrote a stern letter listing the activities of anti-national elements in the state, including the burning of the national flag, the attack on the Indian cricket team and the six *gurmat* camps of the AISSF.

The brunt of the Congress(I)'s attack focussed on several incidents in the state during which Pakistani flags were raised or pro-Pakistani slogans shouted —and the state administration failed to apprehend the culprits or stop them. Such incidents occurred in August 1982 and in October 1983, when India and West Indies played a one-day cricket match in Srinagar. The same month an abortive attempt was made to blow up a transmitter on Hari Parbat in the city, while the people protested when Maqbool Butt was hanged last February.

Some of these incidents obviously needed a firm hand, but there were others that the Congress(I) chose to blow out of proportion, and it succeeded in drawing attention to them because the state government chose to soft pedal them. For instance, even after the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF) was banned, Farooq failed to apprehend its leaders in the state. He explains: "I accepted the government order about the ban, but I can't take away the freedom of the people just because they belong to a

Shah with Mrs Gandhi and (below) with governor and Cabinet: convenient alliances





G.M. SHAH

High Hopes

A LAW graduate from Aligarh Muslim University and a Fellow of the London School of Economics, Gulam Mohammad Shah, 64, shot into prominence when he was detained for over eight years along with his father-in-law Sheikh Abdullah in 1953. After his release, Shah was entrusted with handling legal cases launched against the Sheikh's family. He began his political career as general secretary of the Plebiscite Front in 1959. Soon after the Sheikh's return to power in 1975, he was inducted as minister of state for food and supplies in 1975. Two years later he was elevated as cabinet minister, a post which he held till August 1982.

His resignation from the Cabinet followed after the Sheikh and Begum Abdullah started grooming Farooq for the chief ministership. Soon after the Sheikh's death, he along with his wife Khalida began a concerted campaign for Farooq's ouster which culminated in the formation of a parallel National Conference and dismissal of Farooq's cabinet last fortnight. Shah spoke to Principal Correspondent PRABHU CHAWLA *at his Srinagar residence about his strategy and future plans. Excerpts:*

Q. *Now that you have become the chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir what are your priorities?*

A. Economic development and restoration of law and order are the most important priorities of my government. The previous government played havoc with the state's economy. There is not even a single area in which Kashmir has not suffered.

Q. *What are the reasons for this decline?*

A. Nothing else but a confrontation with the Central Government and the violent atmosphere in the state. Otherwise tourists were coming to our state earlier.

Q. *Why was Farooq in confrontation with the Centre?*

A. Farooq was interested in becoming an all-India leader so that he could become a hero of the Muslims. Nothing else. He kept his own personal interest above that of the state's. Conclave was meant for the removal of Indiraji from the Centre. Why should Kashmir join hands with those who want her removal. The fight for the prime ministership is for those living beyond Pathankot, and Kashmiris have no interest in it.

Q. *Do you mean that there should not be any opposition to the Congress(I) in Jammu & Kashmir?*

A. Definitely yes. But can we poor Kashmiris afford a running battle with the Centre especially when our annual wage bill is Rs 150 crore against an internal revenue of Rs 70 crore. I have to get money from the Centre. If I fight with them, will they give me anything?

Q. *There are other non-Congress(I) governments in the country, but they don't support the Centre because*



Shah: "promise of support"

they are short of money and depend on the Centre for finances?

A. But they are not as poor as we are. Jammu & Kashmir is the poorest state in the whole country but the richest so far as the natural beauty and resources are concerned. God has given us everything but we have not given anything to the country.

Q. *But don't you think that political opposition to the Centre should not be construed as hostility and the Centre should not hold back assistance just because a state government is anti-Congress ?*

A. But why should there be political opposition. I have nothing common with the opposition like the Marxists. Jyoti Basu doesn't believe in God but I do. I don't believe in Hindu India as Jan Sangh does. Ideologically I identify myself with the Congress(I) and nobody else because it believes in socialism, democracy and secularism.

Q. *Do you want to say that the Sheikh was closer to the Congress(I)?*

A. Of course. It was complete identity of thoughts.

Q. *But the Sheikh fought against the Centre and the Congress(I).*

A. He fought as a regional party against a national party but he never created a confrontation with the Centre. Even after the 1977 elections, there were no fights with the Central Government. Sheikh Saheb maintained good relations with Indiraji and other central leaders. People want prosperity, people want welfare not confrontation.

Q. *What was the recent provocation which forced you to break away from your brother-in-law and join hands with the Congress(I)?*

A. Farooq's government encouraged secessionists and anti-national forces in the state and nothing else. There is nothing personal about it. Farooq does not have a share in my property while I have through my wife some interest in the property he owns. But I have told my wife not to claim a single penny or an inch of land from the property left behind by Sheikh Saheb.

Q. *People in the state allege that you are very arrogant in your behaviour?*

A. They had no other stick to beat me. They could not say that I was dishonest because people knew that I wasn't. They can't say that I am a liar because the people know I am very straightforward and speak the truth.

Q. *Do you think that you were sidelined because Begum Abdullah was on Farooq's side. Even you had proposed Farooq's name for chief ministership.*

A. Begum as the mother has a love for her elder son. When I proposed Farooq's name I genuinely believed that youth should take over now because they would live long and do something good for the state. But within one year he proved inefficient.

Q. *What kind of government did Farooq provide to the state?*

A. Totally corrupt and non-serious. He never took the job seriously.

Q. *How are you going to survive? Have you been assured support directly by Mrs Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi?*

A. I have not met her recently. I saw her last in December 1983. There was no necessity to meet her after that. Now I will see her quite regularly in connection with the problems of the state. I don't know Rajiv Gandhi personally, I am not that type.

Q. *Don't you think that you are at the mercy of the Congress(I) at the moment? Your government will collapse the day it withdraws its support.*

A. Not at all. They have given me unconditional support.

Q. *But they did it with Sheikh Abdullah. If they repeat it now what will you do?*

A. I will go to the people for fresh mandate.

banned organisation. I took action when they behaved in a manner which was not in the national interest." Retorts Mangat Ram Sharma, general secretary of the state Congress(I) unit: "When did he in his 12-month regime take action against anti-national elements? He took half-hearted action only when he was directed to do so by the Central Government. If he had accepted the Centre's advice, the plane would not have been hijacked." Behind it all was the outrage at Farooq's electoral alliance with Maulvi Farooq.

In stepping up its anti-Farooq campaign, the Congress(I)'s objective was to move against extremists as well as deter the chief minister from hobnobbing with the national Opposition. Admitted a Congress(I) leader from Jammu: "We would have allowed him to continue in office if he had confined his politics to the state. Not only was he allowing himself to be exploited by the Opposition, he was also permitting them to use the state's resources to attack Indiraji." Alleges Qasim: "It is now distinctly clear that Farooq has been punished for his 'sin' of aligning himself with democratic, secular and progressive forces. Mrs Gandhi just wanted a puppet government and she masterminded the coup within the family to fulfil her party's evil designs."

Farooq himself contributed in no small way to his fall. He was seen as the happy-go-lucky chief minister of a highly sensitive border state and that of a pushy politician aiming for the lights of the national stage. He also pushed through many controversial steps such as the Resettlement Act which permits people in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to return and settle on this side of the border and legislation which gives the state Government unlimited powers to ban a political party, a trade union, or a newspaper. Again, though he was catapulted to the state's top seat in a cleverly planned two-staged operation, being brought in as health minister while the Sheikh was still alive and being elevated to the driver's seat within hours of his death, the clandestine manner of his rise generated a lot of resentment among the NC old guard.

FAROOQ made matters worse by striking out at the Sheikh's close aides like Thakur and Shah in a purge a week after his father's death, sacking all the cabinet ministers and inducting a brand new team, many of whom didn't see eye-to-eye with the old guard. A few months later he dissolved the 33-member NC executive and expelled Shah and others from the party. Recalls Thakur, who was instrumental in Farooq's becoming chief minister: "We expected a lot of things from this young budding politician. All of us genuinely believed that he would be able to wear his father's mantle well but within three months he proved himself unfit for ruling a state like Jammu & Kashmir."

Farooq's casual attitude to administration and party affairs also weighed heavily against him. Secretariat officials say that he attended office only seven days in a month. He was in the state for less than 200 of the 385 days he was chief minister, making over 30 visits to Delhi and a dozen to Bombay and other state capitals to attend opposition meetings or on social engagements. He would abandon cabinet or official meetings in mid-deliberation and disappear to unknown destinations. Says a senior official: "Unlike his father Farooq was never seriously interested in administration. It was always a one-sided affair, with all of us initiating discussion and notes with no response from him." Of Farooq's 30-odd cabinet meetings, only six lasted over two hours and over a dozen ended without the agenda being completed.

Nor could Farooq exhibit much initiative towards the state's development. While the Sheikh's regime is credited with laws for forest nationalisation, reduction of subsidies, new incentives to attract capital and for the tourism industry, the Farooq government could not keep even its budget under control, and last month it left a whopping overdraft of Rs 27 crore with the Jammu & Kashmir Bank. In addition, the state owed over Rs 30 crore to the director-general of supply and disposal for the goods it had delivered. Says Khola Lata Wakhloo, the new tourism minister: "Farooq was never concerned about the state's economy. His management was so bad that we will find it difficult



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Farooq does the rounds on a motorcycle (right); and (below) with opposition leaders at the meeting in Delhi



FAROOQ ABDULLAH

Defiant

DR FAROOQ Abdullah, 44, Jammu & Kashmir's ousted chief minister began his political career only in 1980 when he was elected unopposed to the Lok Sabha. But during this short span of four years, Farooq's meteoric rise was envied by his own partymen. From MP *he became a minister in his father's cabinet, then president of the ruling National Conference and ultimately chief minister. Farooq spoke to Principal Correspondent* PRABHU CHAWLA *at his Gupkar Road residence. Excerpts:*

Q. *Many people think that you were taken by surprise by the withdrawal of support by 12* MLA*'s. Even your intelligence set-up had failed to forewarn you.*

A. I was not surprised at all. I knew that it was going to come about some day. The only thing I was hoping was that these people will not sell themselves. They came to see me on Id day here when they had already signed the letter withdrawing their support.

Q. *Do you think that the Congress(I) paid people to topple your government?*

A. Maybe it is possible. The Congress(I)'s basic aim is to come into power in this state which decisively rejected them in the last assembly elections.

Q. *You and your party maintain that your dismissal is unconstitutional. Can you elaborate on it?*

A. Under our own Constitution, the governor is bound by the chief minister's advice. It was done in 1977 when Sheikh Saheb was leading a minority government. The whole assembly was dominated by the Congress (I). Sheikh Saheb went to the governor only after he lost the support of the Congress (I). Today when I do the same thing, Delhi says nothing doing because Delhi can do anything and still get away with it.

Q. *But your opponents believe that your dismissal has not evoked massive protest in the state.*

A. What do you want them to do —burn India?

Q. *What is your reaction to the Congress (I) charge that your government was not taking any action against anti-national elements in the state.*

A. They want to malign me in the eyes of the people of the rest of India and isolate me from them. They did not spare my father. They dubbed him pro-Pakistan, pro-America and what not. They are doing the same thing now.

Q. *But what about the Gurmat camps which were held in Jammu & Kashmir?*

A. But these camps were not held in my state alone. According to Union Home Minister P.C. Sethi, out of the 14 Gurmat camps held in the various parts of the country, six were held in Jammu & Kashmir. Others were held in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. He also declared on the floor of the House that these camps were purely religious.

Q. *But what about armed training?*

A. You mean if armed training was given we wouldn't know about it.



Farooq: "I'll fight it out"

Apart from our intelligence we have RAW here, BSF intelligence, IB here, military intelligence here. You name it they are here.

Q. *Did you arrest their important leaders?*

A. What was the necessity. Have I to just arrest a man because his colour is like this and he belongs to that organisation even if he doesn't do anything which is anti-national.

Q. *Do you feel that the governor was responsible for your dismissal?*

A. Not exactly. I think he has been overpowered by New Delhi.

Q. *What are your important achievements as state's chief minister?*

A. I don't know. I don't know if in a year there can be any achievements at all. My major contribution was to bring Jammu & Kashmir into the national mainstream.

Q. *You had very good relations with the Gandhis who were instrumental in catapulting you to chief ministership after Sheikh Saheb's death. What suddenly went wrong?*

A. Because we just did not agree with each other. They wanted enough assembly seats so that I would be at their mercy. Farooq Abdullah would never form any government at anybody's mercy.

Q. *But even after the elections, attempts were made to sort out problems. What happened after that which turned the Congress(I) against you violently?*

A. I don't know that. Soon after our return from Saudi Arabia we wanted to call on her. But the tragedy with Mrs Gandhi is that the people who surround her feed her with all sorts of information. She never got correct information about Jammu & Kashmir.

Q. *Can you identify those people who are surrounding Mrs Gandhi and giving her wrong information?*

A. Unfortunately, I don't know what I have done to Mr Fotedar who is now in the prime minister's camp. And Mr Arun Nehru. I don't have anything to do with Arun Nehru but yet he is my bitter opponent there.

Q. *What is your future course of action?*

A. I am going to the people in the villages, in the streets. We will consolidate our support at the grassroots. After that I will move out of the state and go to the other parts of the country to expose the Central Government.

Q. *Will you try to regain majority and form a government?*

A. I will not adopt the stupid methods which others have done. Farooq Abdullah will never stoop low just to get power. I may be a stupid politician, but India has to change. I will fight it out.

Q. *How would you be able to keep it up for five years if this government continues in power?*

A. What is the split? My sister and my brother. What sanction have they with the people. Go to them and seek their opinion. Just because I didn't make my brother-in-law the deputy chief minister and my brother, chief of the state tourism development corporation, this is what is happening. Here it is Mrs Gandhi's party which is supporting them. People are not with them.

Q. *But do you agree that it is the family dispute which is responsible for your fall?*

A. It is not entirely true. In Mrs Gandhi's family there is dispute between daughter-in-law and the family.

Q. *Do you think that the Congress(I) is following anti-national policies?*

A. Yes, their policies are not in the national interest.

cult to pay even the salaries."

According to the recent review of the Finance Department, Farooq's government committed recurring annual expenditure of over Rs 5 crore in 125 non-productive cases without seeking the department's approval. Over a dozen senior posts, each with a salary of over Rs 5,000 a month, were created to accommodate people close to him. Important officials could be transferred within a few hours: over a dozen senior IAS and locally recruited Kashmir Administrative Service (KAS) officials were transferred at least six times in two years.

Jammu & Kashmir is perhaps the first Indian state where not a single directly recruited IPS officer was given charge of any of the 14 districts. The practice of eclipsing the central services was part of the Sheikh's strategy to keep a tight control on the state. Farooq continued his father's policy, and apart from Leh district, district magistrates in the state's other 13 districts belonging to the KAS. He discouraged all-India services officers from coming to the state: 29 posts in an IAS sanctioned cadre of 109 were vacant.

FAROOQ granted a two-year extension to Peer Gulam Hasan Shah, the state director-general of police, an unprecedented move for a state government. Shah began his career at a very junior level and superseded at least three other IPS officers on the way. At police camps, Farooq rewarded police officers from Jammu & Kashmir and ignored those from outside. Alleges Sannaullah Dar, the newly-appointed industry and commerce minister: "Farooq had no respect for established norms and rules of administration. As a result of his hamhanded behaviour, the entire administration collapsed."

The party was also neglected. The grassroots were withering and the central office did nothing to counter the Congress(I)'s campaign. Farooq depended heavily on his and his mother's stronghold on the Kashmiris. Begum Abdullah, at 76, wields considerable clout: it was she who by her speeches convinced the people that Farooq was a worthy successor to his father and it was her unqualified backing of her son that forced her son-in-law to opt out of the race and unwillingly propose Farooq's name.

But the party suffered. Complains Kochak, general secretary of the Khalida-led NC: "The party had become Farooq's pocket borough. He hardly convened any meetings of district-level office-bearers and even ignored repeated requests from MLA's to call legislature party meetings. Opposition to the Government was considered a personal affront to Farooq himself." Adds Hissamuddin Bandey, MLA and now transport and food minister: "We felt suffocated in Farooq's company. There was no place for discussion. Even senior MLA's were snubbed and humiliated. We were forced to raise the banner of revolt."

The banner of revolt and the subsequent fall of Farooq's government could prove a blessing in disguise for him and the national Opposition, which has already united behind the ousted leader. Farooq has a chance to make his own mark in the valley, as well as become a powerful enemy of the Congress(I). Says Gulam Mohiddin Shah, the state's former power minister: "Farooq has now become a national-level politician. He will be able to fight Mrs Gandhi in the rest of the country. Let us see how the Congress(I) keeps this government."

Farooq's NC is planning a month-long civil disobedience, with protest marches in important towns, tehsils and block headquarters. Says Sheikh Nazir: "We will knock at every door and tell the people that they have been robbed by the Central Government." Farooq, along with other opposition leaders, is expected to tour the entire country to mobilise sympathy and support. Ironically, the Opposition stands to gain more from this: they can hardly get him votes in the valley while he can swing Muslim votes for them in the rest of India.

The Centre, for its part, is determined to maintain Shah in power. Sayed said last fortnight that his party had extended unconditional support to the Shah Ministry, called it a "friendly government" and added that there was no reason to doubt its bona fides. The Congress(I) has already started public meetings in its strongholds while Shah has begun to go to the people, addressing his first meeting in Tral, the constituency of the independent MLA supporting him.

The new chief minister has started obliging the Centre: in a two-day drive the police hauled in 220 Sikh extremists including leaders of the outlawed AISSF and 70 people belonging to pro-Pakistan organisations. The state Government also sacked over half a dozen employees actively associated with the AISSF. Comments Gulam Rasool Kar, a nominated Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member from the state: "Shah has begun well. As long as he continues to adopt policies which do not clash with ours, we will not withdraw our support." Shah's main problem is not his subservience to the Congress(I) but his image: Kashmiris see him as an arrogant politician who is not open to reason. Instances are cited of his high-handed behaviour towards junior officials. Now that he has become chief minister, he may change but there are enough doubting Thomases who believe he can't.



Kashmiri family with Sheikh's portrait

That, however, is the least of Shah's problems. To begin with, he must cross the legal hurdle put in his way by the state's anti-defection laws, and convince the speaker that his rebel band from the NC does, indeed, have the right to remain in the Assembly. He must also, then, prove that his regime, backed as it is by the Congress(I), has majority support in the



Assembly. And, finally, he must cope with the popularity of his estranged brother-in-law. Farooq won office in the state because he was undoubtedly the most popular leader in the valley, and neither the alleged incidents listed as evidence of his softness towards anti-national elements, nor the state's administrative lapses, nor the inner-party coup which deposed him have changed that.

Shah can also expect problems from his just cemented alliance with the Congress(I). Much more than Farooq, it was Shah who in the past adopted a tough stand towards the Centre, and in all aspects of the state's special constitutional relationship with the Centre. His newfound conciliatory attitude towards the Centre contrasts with the tough line he always advocated while the Sheikh was alive. In fact, by making Shah chief minister with its support, the Congress(I) now has him on a tight leash: the minute it wants, it can withdraw support and topple him.

But the control that the Congress(I) has now acquired on the state Government will have to be exercised carefully. Jammu & Kashmir is no ordinary state, and if it was its special importance in India's security calculations which prompted the Centre to opt for a more pliable chief minister then it is that very consideration that must make it tread warily. For the problem in the valley has never since the toppling of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 lain in the chief ministers or the administrations; but in the outlook of the 4 million people of the valley. The Sheikh's original successors, starting with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, were men committed to India, yet it took the Centre almost a quarter century to recognise that Kashmir would remain a problem unless the one man who gave substance to Kashmiri pride and identity, Sheikh Abdullah, was restored to office.

There is a danger of that lesson having been forgotten. By encouraging party breakers, the Congress(I) has enlarged the area of instability in the country at a time when the need is to narrow Centre-state conflicts. For if Farooq's ouster plunges Jammu & Kashmir into a fresh instability, the gain will be a short-lived one.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

HIJACK

A Bizarre Drama

INDIA Charlie Four Zero Five Boeing Hijacked". With that terse message monitored by Alpha Control, the sensitive defence monitoring network, at 4.41 p.m. on July 6 and another Indian Airlines aircraft in flight began the most bizarre of the nine hijacks involving Indian commercial aircraft so far. But for the 264 passengers and crew who had boarded the Indian Airlines Airbus at Srinagar airport en route to Delhi 20 minutes earlier, the bizarre element was only evident after a harrowing 22-hour ordeal at Lahore airport which left three members of the crew wounded and also many of the passengers roughly manhandled.

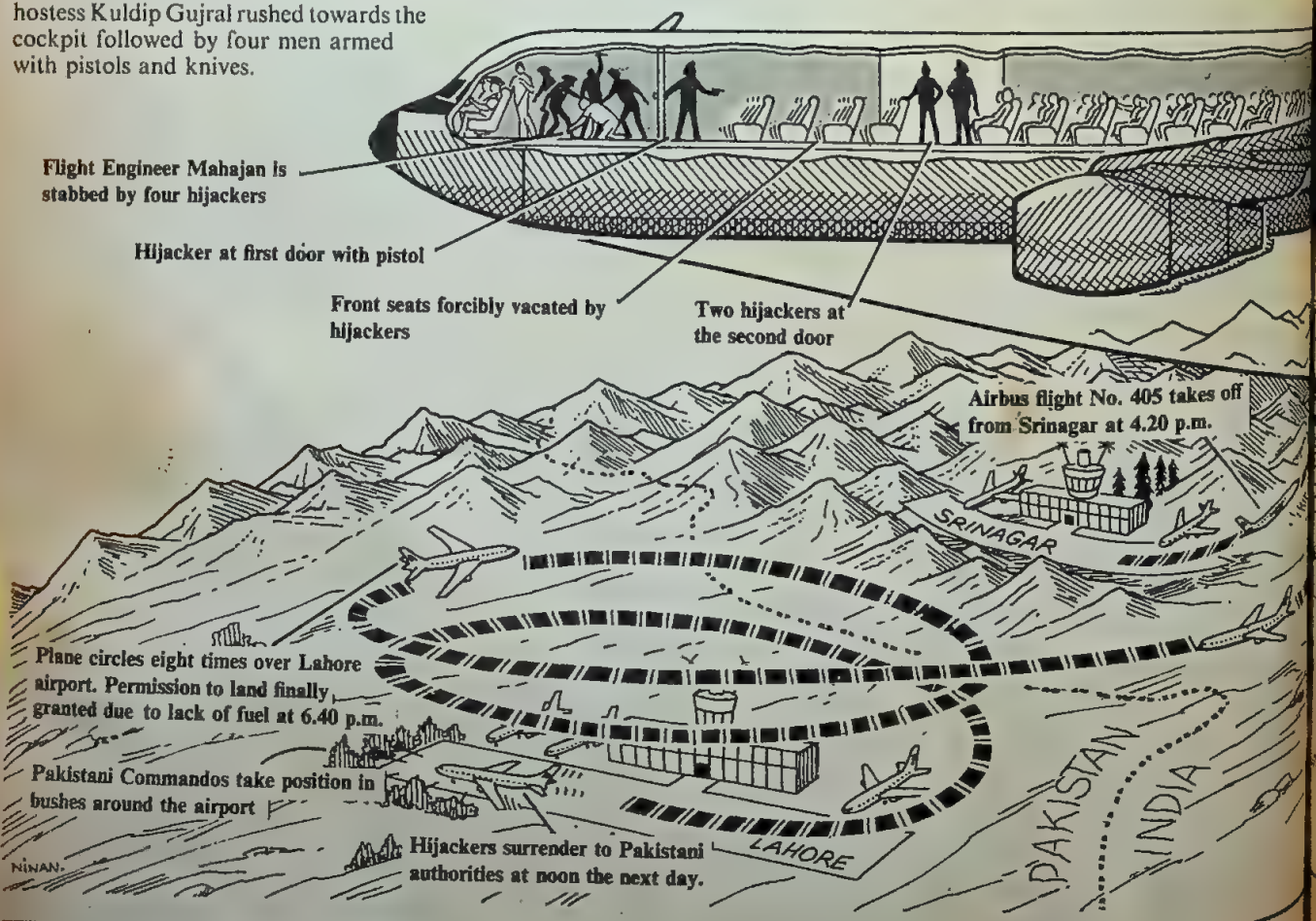
That the end could have been more tragic was uppermost in the minds of the passengers, when a group of passengers mainly Sikhs, suddenly erupted into the aisles screaming slogans. Passengers in the front mistook the shouting for a quarrel but all doubts vanished when air hostess Kuldip Gujral rushed towards the cockpit followed by four men armed with pistols and knives.

Inside the cockpit, Captain C.S.P. Singh, the flight commander, ordered the doors locked. The hijackers then grabbed hold of the flight purser V.K. Mehta and demanded he open the door. When he failed to get the door unlocked, he was stabbed and roughly pushed aside. Meanwhile, in the cockpit, flight engineer P.N. Mahajan put his weight against the door to give Captain Singh time to radio the news of the hijacking.

Frustrated in their attempts to commandeer the cockpit, the hijackers fired three shots at the door. One went through the door and hit Mahajan on the hip. The other two, fortunately, embedded themselves in the door. With the gunfire, the cockpit was quickly opened and the hijackers stormed in while five others took up vantage positions at the rear and in the middle of the aircraft. At 5.07 p.m. the full alert was issued, stating that the aircraft was under the control of the hijackers and that it was presently proceeding towards Lahore.

The next 10 minutes were the worst in the ensuing nightmare as the hijackers rampaged through the aircraft terrorising passengers, especially two army officers in uniform. Brigadier Malhotra had his epauletes ripped off and was repeatedly accused of having been involved in the storming of the Golden Temple. By now, there was no doubt that the hijackers were Sikh terrorists. Passengers were ordered to chant pro-Bhindranwale slogans and recite the gurbani and also shout abuse against Mrs Gandhi.

On the ground, the drama was equally tense. Lahore airport refused the plane permission to land and the Airbus was forced to circle the airport a dozen times. Finally, with the fuel dangerously low, permission was given. The view from the passenger windows on landing was hardly reassuring. Menacing gun barrels were trained on the aircraft and commandos had taken up positions in the bushes surrounding the runway. In response, the hijackers acquired additional weapons in the form of two fire axes and a two-and-a-half foot landing gear safety pin. In reality, the nine hijackers had be-



tween them just one .22 pistol and a toy gun and kirpans.

The hijackers listed their demands shortly after the aircraft landed at Lahore at 5.50 p.m.—unwittingly, in the process, giving anxious officials of the two governments the first clue to their identity. Apart from a ransom of $25 million, the demands included immediate withdrawal of the army from the Golden Temple. The deadline set was for 2 a.m. At 3 a.m., one hour after the deadline had passed, the leader of the hijackers, who called himself "Hasan Maullah" (Master of all) spoke to the control tower again and demanded that the plane be refuelled, the baggage unloaded, lights set up around the aircraft and six Sikh terrorists in jail including Harminder Singh Sandhu, general secretary of the outlawed All India Sikh Students' Federation be released. The Pakistan authorities declined to go along, as the following transcript of the conversation between the control tower and hijackers shows:

Lahore tower: Where do you want to go?

Hijackers: We will decide where we want to go.

Tower: Why don't you come out and get some fresh air. We can bring you food. Allow the passengers out for some time.

Hijackers: We do not want food. In the Golden Temple Sikhs stayed for three days without food. How does it matter if passengers go without food? What about our request for fuel?

Tower: Tanker and staircase for baggage on the way. Will be with you in 15 minutes.

(Half an hour later)

Hijackers: What about our request?

Tower: Tanker and staircase in position. Tanker also connected but cannot accede to request until passengers are also released.

Hijackers: Not possible.

Tower: There will be no fuel unless you release some passengers. Let's say 25 passengers for one tonne of fuel. (The requirement was 25 tonnes) (after consultations)

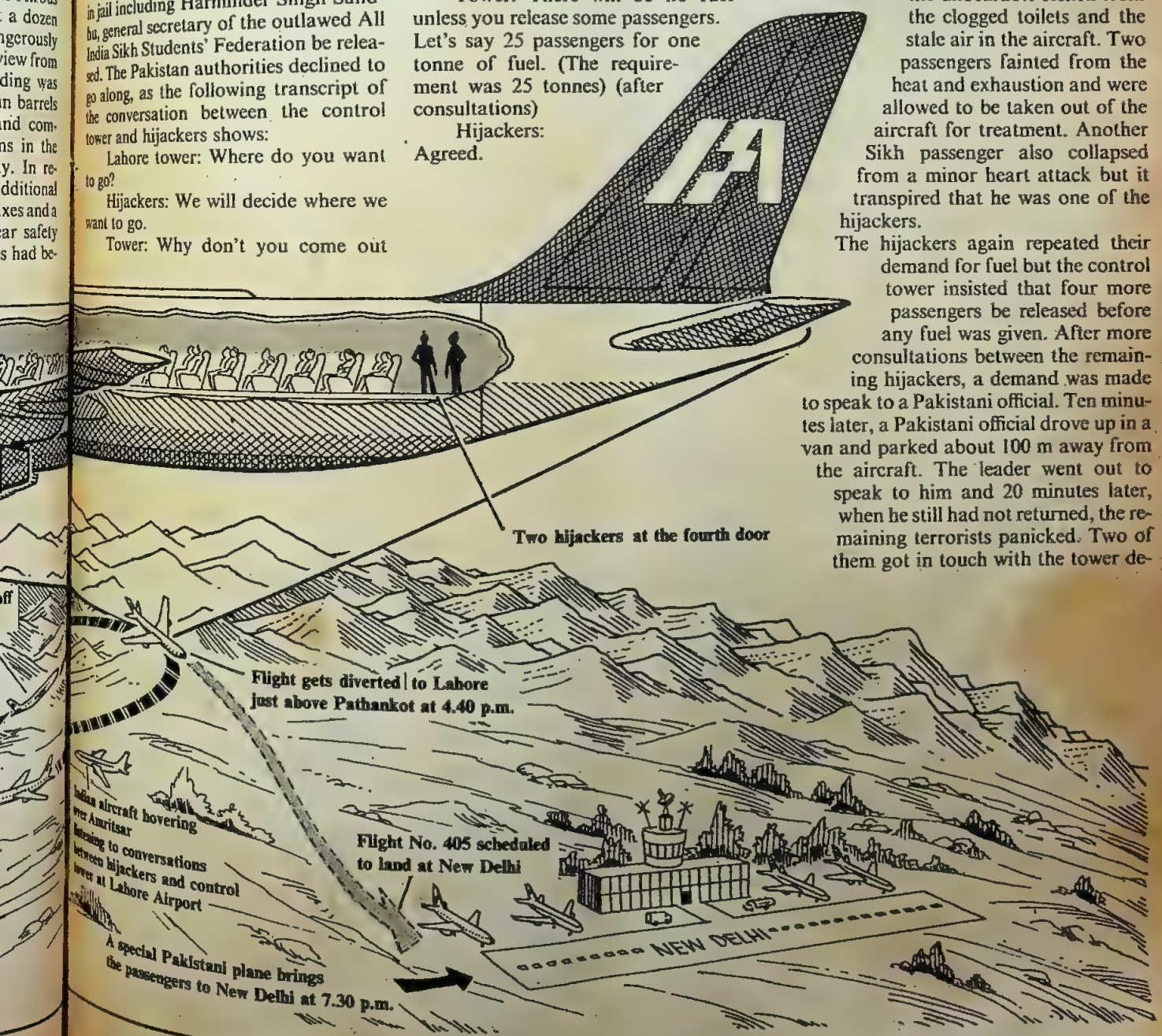
Hijackers: Agreed.

Tower: The release should be in this order. First the ladies and children and Indian nationals. Later, the rest.

Hijackers: Agreed.

Meanwhile, the discomfiture of the passengers, among whom were four journalists, was getting acute. Though the auxiliary generator had been switched on, they were feeling uncomfortable by now, having been ordered by the hijackers not to move their limbs or speak to each other. They were not given any food or water either. "I don't think anybody slept at all the whole night," says Mukund Patel, 22, a resident of the US on holiday in India. To add to the discomfort was the wailing of the 15 infants and some of the women on board the aircraft, the unbearable stench from the clogged toilets and the stale air in the aircraft. Two passengers fainted from the heat and exhaustion and were allowed to be taken out of the aircraft for treatment. Another Sikh passenger also collapsed from a minor heart attack but it transpired that he was one of the hijackers.

The hijackers again repeated their demand for fuel but the control tower insisted that four more passengers be released before any fuel was given. After more consultations between the remaining hijackers, a demand was made to speak to a Pakistani official. Ten minutes later, a Pakistani official drove up in a van and parked about 100 m away from the aircraft. The leader went out to speak to him and 20 minutes later, when he still had not returned, the remaining terrorists panicked. Two of them got in touch with the tower de-





PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARDAU/THE MUS...M

(From left) hijacker emerges shouting slogans; two of the non-Sikh hijackers, and the fourth being attended to

manding to know where their leader was. "If you do not tell us, we will kill the passengers and throw their bodies out one by one and blow up the plane," they threatened. The hijack leader, however, returned to the plane, consulted with his colleagues, and then went out again.

When he returned the second time, the hijackers underwent a radical change. After the first 10 minutes of the hijack, they had calmed down and even chatted with the passengers, passing around cherries. But now, they were in an ugly mood. Tapes of Bhindranwale's speeches were played over the public address system and the hijackers ordered the passengers to "prepare yourselves for death". One of the hijackers then produced a round object wrapped in a towel which he claimed was a bomb. (It later turned out to be a roll of toilet paper).

Then came the anticlimax. Without giving any reasons, the hijackers announced that they were releasing all the passengers "on humanitarian grounds". Even in far-away Delhi, members of the task force monitoring the drama with the help of an aircraft circling over Amritsar airport were totally dumbfounded by the sudden volte-face and the meek surrender of the hijackers.

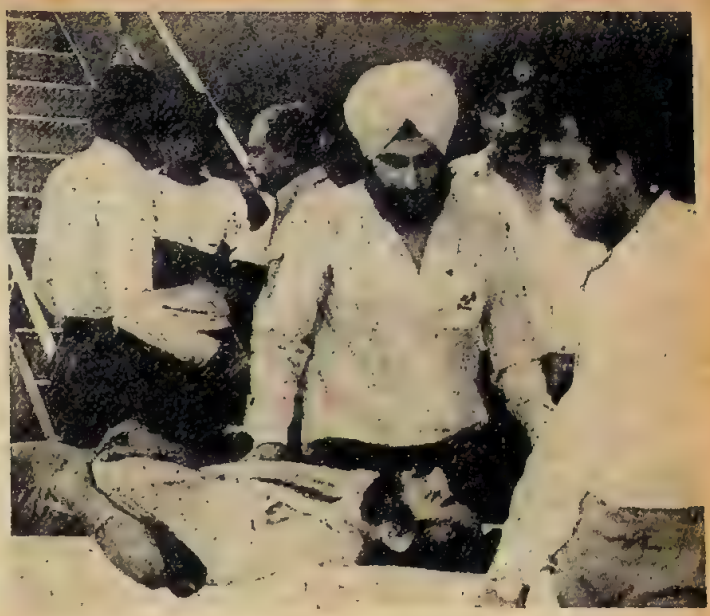
While the Indian Government has expressed its appreciation to the Pakistan Government for its handling of the situation in public, privately top Indian officials complain about some aspects of its handling of the drama at Lahore. The three Indian officials who arrived at Lahore airport—Indian Ambassador K.D. Sharma, who flew in from Islamabad, Captain Bhasin, director of air safety, and a senior Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) officer who helicoptered in from Amritsar—were isolated from the negotiations. They were not allowed near the aircraft but were kept in a separate room and given half-hourly reports.

THE STATEMENTS given by the passengers are also highly contradictory, both about the treatment meted out to them by the hijackers and in their versions of the negotiations with Pakistan authorities. But two passengers suggest that some sort of a deal was struck with the hijackers. Swraj Kaushal, a New Delhi advocate, says that "the hijackers were received by a senior Pakistan police official who shook hands with them when they alighted from the aircraft". Another passenger, Parash Jain, says that "when they (the hijackers) got down from the plane, they were looking very pleased with themselves".

But what precisely the deal that was presumably struck at this stage was can only be guessed at. The most logical is that the hijackers were offered political asylum (there are five earlier Sikh hijackers still in Pakistan). That would also corroborate the general feeling in Indian intelligence circles that the hijackers were mostly amateurs, judging by their sudden surrender and the fact that they obvi







ously had no fixed destination in mind when they demanded fuel.

Two mysteries stand out from this still confused episode. The first is, how did the hijackers manage to smuggle weapons aboard the plane. Six of them are known to have bought their tickets at the airport while two bought theirs in Delhi and one in Srinagar. Srinagar security is considered to be stricter than at other airports and was more so at the time of the hijacking since a red alert had been issued in the wake of the Punjab action.

Yet a secret preliminary report on airport security by Additional Chief Secretary R.K. Takkar shows up an unusual amount of behind-the-scenes laxity. For instance, some 300 people are authorised to enter the operational areas of the airport, and there appears to be no adequate security clearance system before these passes are issued. Takkar also felt that there was room for improvement in the search of personal baggage and that the police force at the airport is substantially below sanctioned strength. Interestingly, of the 99 policemen on security duties, only 51 were on duty on the day of the hijacking—of whom 36 were interrogated and 12 ultimately, suspended. Moreover, the investigation has been handed over to central agencies.

Discounting the possibilities of the arms evading the security searches, Takkar concludes: "The possibility that easily comes to one's mind is of the arms and ammunition being quietly smuggled into the aircraft through some member of the large government and airlines staff on duty which has been supplied with entry passes for the prohibited areas and, with respect of the employees of Indian Airlines, inside the aircraft as well."

While this remains to be proved —and is not likely to be unless the Pakistani authorities interrogated the hijackers thoroughly, there is also a continuing mystery about the identity of most of the hijackers. Only a few of them are known. Their leader, Parminder Singh, is a first year student at Chandigarh University. He left his house after the army action in the Golden Temple and had been living in Srinagar since. Another hijacker, Manjit Singh, has been identified as a constable in Chandigarh deputed for VIP security. Ravinder Singh is the son of a retired government official in Srinagar while the rest are said to be residents of Jammu.

Pakistani officials have released the names of eight hijackers, six of which tally with the names they gave in the passenger manifest. Intelligence officials in Delhi have so far been unable to identify any of the hijackers from their photographs, which would indicate that they are not known terrorists. Pakistan has made it clear that it has no intentions of handing over the hijackers to India, which means that the hijacking of IC 405 will remain a bizarre mystery till fresh evidence comes to light.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

The remaining four hijackers, including leader Parminder Singh (extreme right) after surrender at Lahore







It was alleged in the original version of the white paper that Pande's administration had messed up the whole situation, misinformed and misguided the Centre... Yesterday's able administrator was turned into today's incompetent novice.

PUNJAB

Passing the Buck



THERE today and gone tomorrow. That just about sums up Bhairab Datt Pande's brief tenure as governor of Punjab. Just nine months ago, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi summoned the 67-year-old bureaucrat from a quiet holiday in Darjeeling and ordered him to take the reins of the beleaguered state after she was forced to remove her own party's government. And last fortnight, he was asked to be in Delhi to okay the final draft of the white paper on Punjab, only to find himself in disagreement with the Centre's assessment. The burden and the blame of the whole Punjab tragedy that resulted in the army's entering the Golden Temple was laid at his door. "It was a wholesale condemnation of his short tenure which he was asked to approve of," said a senior officer at Punjab's Raj Bhawan. Finding that and an indirect public rebuke from the President when he visited the Golden Temple (INDIA TODAY, June 30)—difficult to swallow, Pande decided to quit.

What surprised both Pande and Pritam Singh Bhindar, who also had to relinquish the post of inspector general of police, was the original version of the white paper. It was Pande's administration which had messed up the whole situation, misinformed and misguided the Centre, it was alleged. In the Centre's view, Pande was accused of preaching conciliation with the agitating Akails even while terrorists continued their deadly attacks—killing and maiming many—during his tenure. Arms were being piled up in the Golden Temple, but he found no clue of these—he and his police chief had failed to control the situation. In short, the Centre was washing its hands off the Punjab mess, and yesterday's able administrator was turned into today's incompetent novice.

Pande is not one to deny his share of the blame. But seen from Chandigarh it was governance by 'remote control', and senior officers—including Cabinet Secretary Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib, the prime minister's Principal Secretary P.C. Alexander, Union Home Secretary M.M.K. Wali—would not let him take any independent decision. And as Pande reminded Mrs Gandhi—whom he had served for five years as cabinet secretary and later as governor of West Bengal—such interference was repeatedly brought to her notice but to no avail.

In his last meeting with Mrs Gandhi, Pande stuck to his original position that a political solution should precede tough administrative action to end violence. Then, as a loyal civil servant, he fully cooperated and supported the military action. By quitting he might have unwittingly given the Opposition another stick to beat the prime minister with: already A.B. Vajpayee, the BJP president, has demanded a full report into it.

Outwardly unruffled, Pande sent his resignation through a messenger as soon as he returned to Chandigarh from Delhi on June 28. And to a friendly officer, discussing the impending reorganisation of the administration, he said: "If it is to be overhauled, let it begin with me."

Others, however, were more forthright. Home Secretary A.S. Pooni would not accept that the Punjab Government was solely responsible. The Centre, he insisted, was kept well-informed all the time, and there was a fair amount of information on the terrorists as well. What were missing were any clear-cut guidelines. Senior officers manning intelligence posts in Chandigarh and Amritsar affirmed that they had built up sufficient sources of information about the terrorists. Even secret meetings between Bhindranwale and Amrik Singh, Harminder Singh Sandhu and Tara Singh were covered well. "Let the army point out even a single piece of information which they have now discovered and which was not reported by us. Fortification maps, arsenal details and the approximate number inside the temple were all sent in writing. Let the records tell the tale," asserted a senior officer.

Bhindar, too, nailed the lie that the information gathering system had failed. He has repeatedly said that intelligence information reached the places it should have reached and that it was a political failure all through. Bhindar, like Pande, believed the Punjab problem to be essentially a political one, and therefore begged for a political solution.

Satarawala certainly faces an uphill task in putting the administration in tune with the new reality of a population sharply divided along communal lines on major issues like the army's entry into the Golden Temple.



In fact, both the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and state CID are one on the issue that the intelligence worked well. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) which had been operating in the state for more than two years, and the military intelligence which began some months back were filling whatever gaps existed, and the question being asked is, to what use was this information put to.

With the ouster of Pande and Bhindar, Mrs Gandhi appears to be suddenly discovering the incompetence of people she has known for years. Pande is a pertinent case. Sauve but publicity-shy, he was carrying out her orders while offering his own assessment. He had chosen neither the police chief, the advisors nor the other officers in the administration.

SINCE the resignation of the then governor Jaisukh Lal Hathi in August 1981 and before Satarawala, Mrs Gandhi has appointed four Punjab governors Aminuddin Khan Ahmad had an eight-month stint, the colourful Marri Channa Reddi stayed for 10 months, A.P. Sharma for just six, and Pande survived for nine. In between Punjab and Haryana High Court Chief Justice S.S. Sandhwalia had a three-week stint.

Advisors have been shunted equally unceremoniously. The first four who were appointed in October 1983, G. Jagathpathy, P.G. Gavai, Harbans Singh and S.S. Sidhu had all left by last June. Surendra Nath was shifted last fortnight from the Home Department, and for the first time since Independence, a serving general, Ranjit Singh Dayal has assumed charge as advisor, (Home), a post with ministerial powers and responsibilities.

The last four years have similarly seen four police chiefs, Birbal Nath, C.K. Sawhney and Bhindar and now. Kirpal Singh Dhillon. Said one of them: "It is so unsure a place, that the moment you start implementing your ideas, you are out."

In the circumstances, choosing a new governor to replace Pande after he resigned was not an easy task. Several names came up including Rao Sahib and Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan, but ultimately K.T. Satarawala, Goa's 69-year-old Lt-governor, was chosen. Satarawala, displaying World War II medals which he won in Burma, proclaimed a close affinity with Punjab in chats with newsmen. "My two daughters are married to two Punjabi young men and I was born in East Punjab," he said repeatedly—skilfully evading questions about the future of the state and his intentions.

Satarawala and his police chief Dhillon certainly face an uphill task in putting the administration in tune with the new reality of a population sharply divided along communal lines on major issues like the army's entry into the Golden Temple. While most Sikhs consider the action an intolerable insult many Hindus think it was unavoidable.

Although over 200 constables and other policemen have been summarily dismissed, Dhillon says he will avoid general screening and wholesale transfers. "This would further demoralise the force. We ought to give the force an honest leadership at all levels," he says. A clean-shaven Jat Sikh hailing from Butter village near Moga, in the heart of the Malwa region, Dhillon is considered well suited to the job. But his success depends largely on how much dead wood he is allowed to chop from a force which once had an enviable image.

A lot of resistance is building up to the idea of change in the IPS and IAS cadres. Mrs Gandhi's statement that only 50 per cent of the positions should be manned by the residents of the state has been attacked as witch-hunting. Already, the IAS association has warned against any wholesale transfers.

Another argument advanced by senior officers including the Chief Secretary K.D. Vasudeva during the new governor's first meeting with them was that the Punjab problem was essentially, a law and order affair which had not prevented the other departments from performing well. Industrial and agricultural production have risen 6 to 8 per cent and the pace of development has not slowed.

But the most delicate question which Mrs Gandhi has to solve is exactly how long the army should remain in the state, and in what manner. The second phase of flushing out the terrorists from the rural areas is coming to an end. Over 4,950 persons were apprehended, 4,820 screened of which 3,000 have been let off. A large cache of arms has been seized, but that is not unusual for a border state like Punjab. "Our first job is nearly over," says a senior general. The only specific task remaining is to complete the interrogation of the alleged terrorists and help the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) launch prosecution. The CBI has registered a case of treason against Bhindranwale, his associates and some unspecified individuals. Currently, the CBI, IB, and the military intelligence are holding long sessions with the arrested terrorists at Amritsar, Nabha, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Ajmer, Delhi's Red Fort, and other unspecified army camps. "We are doing a thorough job," says a senior army officer who is in charge of interrogating the terrorists. Many heads will certainly roll after the interrogation is completed.

But the army's presence is required for other reasons. For one, it is required to keep communal peace. For another, an early pull out could jeopardise whatever has been achieved. Intelligence sources say that over 100 hard core terrorists escaped from the Golden Temple on June 2 and 3 and over two score in the morning of June 7 during the army operation. The later killings and plane hijack are a pointer to this.

On the other hand, if the military is used in mopping up operations in the villages, it could become increasingly unpo-

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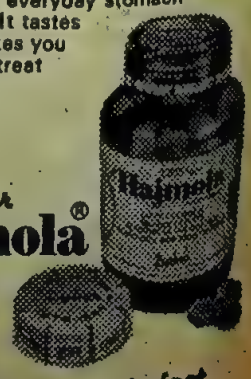
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The Government fears that the SGPC may decide to retain the Akal Takht in its present damaged form as a kind of memento... Any attempt to forcibly rebuild it will cause a sharp reaction among the Sikhs.



pular. "Punjab is a border state and provides us men and officers, and we count on it during peace time too. Thus any schism between us and the people could be very dangerous," says a senior commander looking after the second phase of the army operations. Besides more force is needed in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir and troop movement to those areas is taking place. "Total withdrawal could be disastrous at this stage," says Surinder Nath, advisor to the governor.

STILL more dangerous is the political void in Punjab created with the total annihilation of the Akali leadership in the wake of the army operation. The moderates have lost all credibility with the Sikh masses the moment they stepped into captivity. Those like Badal and Barnala, who were outside the Golden Temple, showed no pragmatism either, came out with inflammatory statements and found themselves in jails almost unsung. The remnants just do not have the clout with masses or political initiative. In fact, former finance minister Balwant Singh, the seniormost Akali leader still outside the prison, has hardly showed any inclination to take-over the ruins of the party. That creates a situation where Mrs Gandhi has no credible Sikh leader to talk to.

The situation has been complicated further with the Aklis threatening to take out *shahidi jathas* (martyrdom processions) to liberate the Golden Temple from the army on July 16. Curiously, the jatha beginning from Patiala will be led by none else than former Congress (I) MP Amarinder Singh who resigned last month in protest against the army operation. Says Prakash Singh Majitha, legislator and convenor of the ad hoc committee formed to run the affairs of the Akali Dal: "The jathas will continue till the army withdraws from the temple. We shall lay as many lives as Mrs Gandhi wants." The Government on the other hand, seems quite firm on stopping the jathas, a situation that could lead to renewed confrontation.

For the Government, the only way out is persuading the Sikh religious leaders, most prominent among them Baba Kharak Singh of Bir Baba Budhaji, to begin *kar sewa*, the voluntary labour Sikhs traditionally undertake to repair, rebuild and maintain their shrines. This has been Buta Singh's mission, but so far success has eluded him.

Hopes were kindled briefly last fortnight as Baba Kharak Singh, who had initially humiliated and even refused to see Buta Singh agreed to leading the *kar sewa*. But shortly afterwards he added the rider that he could do so only if the SGPC and the Sikh head priests formally approached him. With the SGPC in a war-like mood, and even trying to secure the head priests' blessing for the *shahidi jathas* that is an unlikely prospect.

There have also been some efforts at non-political levels. A team of Delhi intellectuals has been planning to take a *kar sewa* team including prominent academics, opinion-leaders and technocrats to Amritsar. Similarly, retired air chief marshal Arjun Singh, lieutenant-general Jagjit Singh Aurora and veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar have been trying to put together some kind of a project. But these are at best marginal efforts and would have no more than symbolic value.

Rumours apart, the Government does not exactly seem inclined to hand over the Golden Temple complex to the SGPC in a hurry. The fear is that the SGPC may decide to retain the Akal Takht in its present damaged form as a kind of a memento which will have tremendous political value for the Akalis in years to come. Yet, the Government cannot indefinitely keep the temple. It belongs to the SGPC which is a statutory body. Also, any attempt to forcibly rebuild the Akal Takht will cause a sharp reaction among the Sikhs. "This," said Majitha, "would be like adding insult to injury." In fact, Akalis would welcome indiscretions like this to re-establish themselves. Says Basant Singh Khalsa, Akali MLA: "Any repression will unite us and make us acceptable to the Sikh masses, whom we have nearly lost."

Faced with a Hobson's choice, the Union Home Ministry is hoping to amend the Gurudwara Act and provide for a different management to which it can safely hand over the temple. Money for repairs will be no problem as crores will be donated for *kar sewa*. "We know there are large amounts of money coming in for this. Already millions of dollars have been collected in many countries," says Bibi Rajinder Kaur, daughter of the late Master Tara Singh and chief of the Akali Dal's women's wing.

But the key question is, will the Akalis allow the repairs to begin? The Government has to tread warily in Punjab. There is no scope for false moves now in a state where one error of judgement could well nigh throw the whole country into turmoil.

—GOBIND THUKRAL in Amritsar

PUNJAB

Operation Whitewash



NO OTHER government publication in recent years has been awaited with such eager anticipation as the White Paper on the events leading to the army crackdown in Punjab. In South Block, the Cabinet Committee chaired by the prime minister had been burning midnight oil for days trying to hammer the final draft into shape. Considering the sensitive nature of the subject, the hesitancy was expected. But the delay was compounded by the numerous additions and deletions that had to be made as new information came in and, even more significantly, powerful bureaucrats and lobbies got into the act, ensuring that nothing specific was said against any wing of the Government.

Frustrated by the delay, the media had been making wild speculations on what the White Paper was likely to contain. Similar guesswork pervaded the corridors of the North Block, which houses the Home Ministry and Punjab civil secretariat where anxious bureaucrats desperately went about trying to figure out what the document would finally contain, who will be blamed and made a scapegoat and, finally, will heads roll? Adding to this was the uncertainty in official circles and nothing characterised it better than the small poster stuck on the entrance of the Press Information Bureau's Press Conference Hall in the morning of July 10, announcing that the copies of the White Paper were ready for distribution. Within minutes, a harried officer, unsure when the document was finally to be released, scribbled "not yet" on the poster.

Amid such excitement, when the 170-page document was released last week, it proved hardly worth all the waiting. Its 58-page text spread over five chapters, 11 annexures and 25 photographs revealed it to be a pale imitation of the promise and more of a whitewash than the detailed, honest and reveal-all account of the events leading to Operation Bluestar. Instead, as Bharatiya Janata Party President Atal Behari Vajpayee who has been vocal in his support of the storming of the temple, trenchantly observed: "It evaded more issues than it touched." No scapegoats were made, no one blamed for the tragedy except the Akalis and the extremists, there was no discussion even on the foreign hand and, predictably enough, no heads were going to roll.

In fact, more than a fact-sheet of the army operation in Punjab and the events that led to it, the document is an indictment of the Akali leadership for their "hesitation, second thoughts, unwillingness to come to definite conclusions in a spirit of give and take and to deal with the pressures of militancy". It gives details of the Akali demands, the various rounds of discussions—open and secret

The White Paper on Punjab was a pale imitation of its promise. No scapegoats were made, no one blamed for the tragedy except the Akalis and the extremists and there was no discussion on the foreign hand...

—between them and the Government and the Government's offers of concessions at various points of time.

In the repetitive jumble, the only significant fact to come out is that beginning with November 16, 1982, the Akali leaders had had nine rounds of secret talks with the Government. The last was, interestingly, held as late as on May 25, 1984, exactly a week before the army was sent into Punjab. It seems reasonable to presume that the final decision to unleash "Operation Bluestar" was taken after this round of discussions at a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) safe house in Delhi, where Union Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao, Pranab Mukherjee and Shiv Shankar were present. But the White Paper does not say so. Nor does it explain what transpired at the other rounds of secret talks, the first two rounds of which were held at the residence of P.C. Alexander, principal secretary to the prime minister.

But the Government claims that while it was inclined to make concessions on almost every demand, it was the Akalis who invariably talked in terms of an absolute surrender and even blocked the implementation of demands accepted by the Government. For example:

- The Government agreed to relay Gurbani directly from the Golden Temple for two hours every day but the SGPC refused the AIR personnel permission to instal transmission facility.
- While the Government agreed to permit nine-inch-long kirpans on the Indian Airlines flights, the Akalis kept on insisting on similar freedom on Air-India too which is bound by international regulations on the carrying of weapons.
- Though the Government agreed in principle for an All-India Sikh Gurudwara Act, the Akali Dal "did not give any definitive list of historical gurudwaras proposed to be brought under the purview of this legislation". "At different meetings", the White Paper alleges, "different number of such gurudwaras was given, ranging from 10 to 30."

In the same vein, the document repeats the Government's old claim of the offer of handing over the river waters question to a tribunal headed by a Supreme Court judge. It skirts the Akali argument as to why the issue could not be handed over to the Supreme Court, instead, for a verdict based on the riparian law. But it claims that the Government had no choice but to give Rajasthan a share of Punjab waters because of an old agreement on sharing of river waters with Pakistan. The suggestion is that any effort to reopen the issue of Rajasthan's share in waters would give Pakistan a new argument.

Similarly, on territorial issues, Centre-state relations and the amendment of Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution, the document repeats the familiar government position. What it does not say, on the other hand, is why did the talks suddenly break down on November 17, 1982 when the two sides had come closest to settlement and a draft agreement had, in fact, been written out. The Akalis have been alleging that this happened because Mrs Gandhi resiled. In the absence of any explanation in the White Paper, it seems, this is another inconvenient point the Government decided to evade.

Even more vague is the section of the document dealing with the Akali agitation, extremism and army action and what it leaves out is more important than what it says. While much of the speculation on the contents of the White Paper has been on the government charge of trouble-mongering by hostile foreign powers, the final version of the document dismisses the aspect with no more than a passing reference. Some of the other important aspects ignored completely are:

▶ Acts of mutiny and desertion in some of the Sikh units of the army following the raid on the Golden Temple.

▶ Origin of a majority of weapons recovered from the terrorists.

▶ The smuggling factor, which was initially blamed for the supply of arms to the terrorists.

▶ Involvement of ex-servicemen including the late major-general Shahbeg Singh in the violence.

▶ The Congress (I)'s favourite allegation that the Farooq Abdullah government in Jammu and Kashmir had been at least indirectly helping the Sikh extremists.

▶ The Opposition's role vis-a-vis the agitation and negotiations.

Evading the allegation of foreign involvement in the Punjab agitation is by far the greatest disappointment in the paper. Couched in bureaucratese the section on foreign involvement begins platitudinously with: "The recent occurrences in Punjab cannot be divorced from the wider international context. The security environment of India has worsened in the last three years. Powerful forces are at work to undermine India's political and economic strength. A sensitive border state with a dynamic record of agriculture and industrial development would be an obvious target for subversion."

The whole issue of foreign involvement is, finally dismissed with an air of high-sounding self-righteousness: "The Government has reasons to believe that the terrorists were receiving different types of active support from certain foreign sources. The significant relationship between internal and external forces of subversion is a well-known fact of the contemporary national scene. However, it would not be in the public interest to divulge information which the Government has on this aspect of terrorism in Punjab. Utmost vigilance is necessary to thwart the designs of those who wish to exploit our internal situation for their own ends."

WHILE no direct allegation has been made against Pakistan, the section dealing with the activities of the Sikh secessionist elements abroad makes veiled references which are, nevertheless, significant even if evasive. The activists of the Dal Khalsa have been quoted as having said that they regarded Pakistan as a natural ally and that "once Khalistan was formed, Pakistan would accord a status similar to that of the Vatican to the Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev near Lahore". Similarly, the paper also mentions that Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan, the self-styled president of the national council of Khalistan has been claiming Pakistani support and that his key lieutenants claim that they have been regularly visiting Pakistan. In euphemisms, the document also suggests that the US, UK and Canada have been allowing the Khalistani secessionist groups to function freely to the detriment of Indian interest.

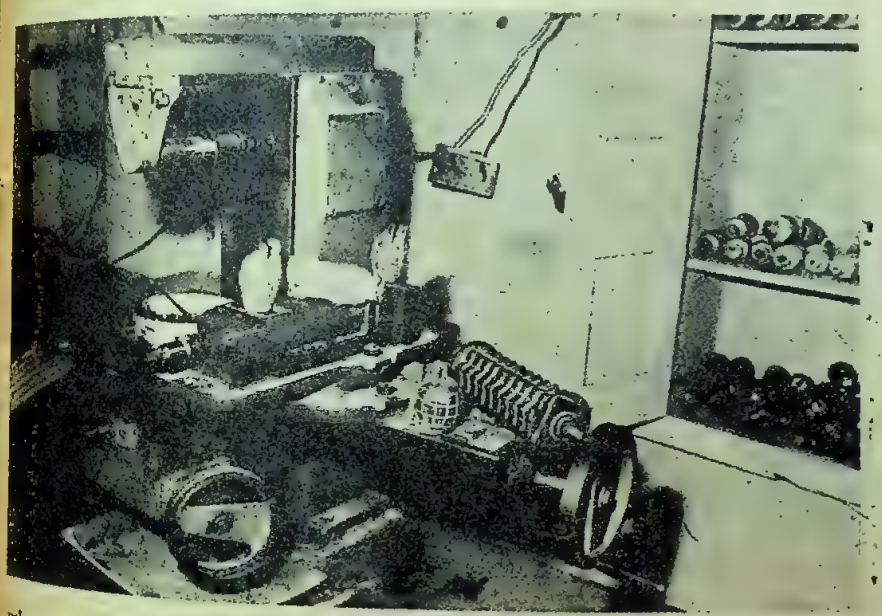
The only striking fact the White Paper mentions gets absurd under this welter of platitudes and unsubstantiated innuendo. It says that in 1982, a Sikh extremist group tried to recruit Sikh militants in the Canadian province of British Columbia to be trained with the help of one Johan Vanderhorst, a mercenary and a Rhodesian veteran. Vanderhorst also put an advertisement in some newspapers calling for "young volunteers with previous military experience on a monthly salary of US $1,250". Vanderhorst claimed that he had been hired by a group of Indians to constitute a team of men, to train Sikhs in the use of firearms and combat techniques to help them takeover Punjab. The source of information, however, is not one of the government's intelligence agencies, but a news report in the *Vencouver Sun*.

If the question of "foreign hand" has been dealt with evasively, the aspect of arming of terrorists has been virtually blacked out. Even the annexure giving the breakdown of the captured weapons does not mention the origin of a majority of weapons barring 52 Chinese-made Kalashnikov (AK-47) assault rifles. The purpose obviously is to conceal the embarrassing fact that a bulk of captured weapons are of Indian origin—in fact many of them are of the kind that would be found only with army units and a small number of battalions of paramilitary forces. There is no mention of the origin of 83 self-loading rifles of 7.62 mm calibre (Indian army's standard infantry weapon) and even 41 light machine guns. Practically all of these, INDIA TODAY's investigations reveal, are of Indian origin.

Another telling omission is of the two medium-machine-guns (MMG) which the Government had earlier claimed to have been captured from the temple complex and which were shown in the publicity pictures released in the first flush of the operation. These have not even been mentioned, perhaps to save the army the embarrassment of publicising a fact that these two had, in fact, been stolen by two deserting non-commissioned officers from a Sikh unit of the army nearly four months ago.

Accordingly, the White Paper has not even made a mention of the problem of smuggling across the Indo-Pakistan border. Said a senior Home Ministry official: "With the benefit of hindsight now we can say we had really jumped the gun in making wild allegations of smuggling and maligning the BSF. Now that the scrutiny of the weapons has thrown up some home truths we realise how hasty we had been."

Yet the White Paper does not totally rule out supply of arms from foreign sources saying, "High authorities abroad



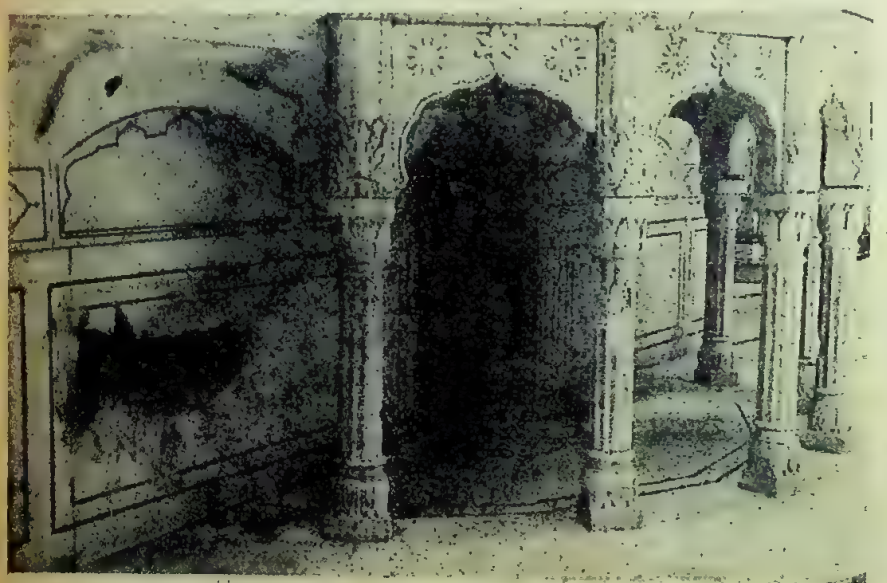
Grenade factory hidden under the Golden Temple entrance

have spoken of the possibility of illegal inflow of large supplies of arms from across the borders." But it also says that while initially the terrorists had gathered weapons through surprise raids on armouries and stray incidents of gun snatching from policemen, later they also got supplies by "developing clandestine links with sources within the country". But the paper throws no light as to who these "sources" could be. There is total silence on the role of some ex-servicemen in adding to trouble.

As in the case of arms, there are no specifics mentioned on the question of instigation of trouble by foreign media, a charge the Government has often made in the past. There is only one innocuous sentence on page 55, reading: "A section of the foreign media is deliberately presenting totally distorted versions of the Punjab situation, which have the effect of encouraging and sustaining separatist activities." While no agency or newspaper has been named, officials do mention in hush-hush tones that the Government is basically hinting at the coverage of the post-Operation Bluestar events by Associated Press (AP). Said a member of the foreign press corps: "It is really unfortunate that the Government chose to make such a vague insinuation which tarred us all with the same brush. If they were upset with any particular publication or agency why were they so bashful of saying so in clear, specific terms?"

The same non-specific tone characterises the discussion on various other aspects. There is a mention of the intelligence failure at "ground level" which comes along with the claim that, basically, the intelligence gathering had been sound. The security agencies have also been absolved of the failure to prevent arms from being smuggled inside the temple as these "were taken in *kar sewa* trucks" that were not searched initially. In any case, the passages on intelligence are in divergence with the charge of total failure that the army generals involved in the operations made to the visiting correspondents in Amritsar.

There are also other differences with the version of operations given out initially. For example, Akali leaders Longowal and Tohra are now reported to have surrendered at 1 a.m. on June 6 and not at 8.30 p.m. on June 5 as stated earlier. This supports the theory that rather than having surrendered on their own they had been forcibly taken out by troops. Highly-placed army sources confirm that they had been taken out by troops who burst into the room in Teja Singh Samundari Hall where they were all congregating. Longowal and Tohra had, in fact, been taken out in an armoured personnel carrier (APC). Also, it disproves the earlier claims that the tanks were not taken close to the Akal Takht.



Firing hole cut by terrorists into marble wall of Akal Takht

Senior officials who do not want to be identified say the vague and non-specific approach of the White Paper is because of the pressures from the various lobbies within the Government. Said an official: "None of the security forces wanted a word to go against it. The Home Ministry and the intelligence agencies canvassed to make sure nothing was said against them. The resignation of Pande and Bhindar at a crucial juncture pre-empted any serious indictment of the Punjab administration. In such a situation people drafting the document faced a dauntingly complicated task."

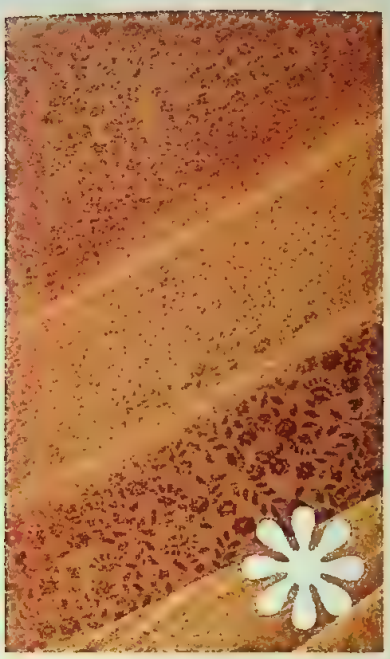
Yet, while it is reasonable that the authors of the paper were treading on thin ice there can hardly be an explanation of a naive error in the last section of the paper showing photographs of terrorist fortifications in and around the Golden Temple complex. The 20th picture in the series showing what are purportedly terrorist fortifications on a housetop covering the approaches to the temple is actually of Balanand Akhara one of the fortified positions of the army and CRPF. In fact it was here that the INDIA TODAY cover picture for the June 30 issue, showing army jawans behind a sandbagged position, was taken. Similarly Annexure-I, which lists the 45 Akali grievances presented to the government in September 1981 has been captioned "List of 45 demands," totally reversing the implication.

Bloomers apart, the documents have drawn flak from a wide cross-section of opposition leaders. While the BJP was the first to come out with a scathing attack, Marxist leader Harkrishan Singh Surjit, who has been involved in the negotiations charged the Government with keeping quiet, and went on to ask, "why had the talks failed repeatedly when a solution seemed so near".

The Akali reaction was predictable. Former Punjab finance minister Balwant Singh said the paper mentioned nothing about the negotiations held between the Akalis and the former external affairs minister Swaran Singh, who had acted as the prime minister's emissary for some time. Said he: "It also does not say that on the eve of the tripartite talks in February this year Hindu organisations engineered riots in Haryana." Ironically, the only anti-Congress(I) politicians happy with the White Paper were in Kashmir. Said National Conference MP Abdul Rashid Kabuli: "It has fully exonerated my party of the vicious propaganda that it was involved in anti-national activities."

Yet, besides nitpicking, even the Opposition leaders did not have too much to complain about, which is a tribute to the harmless nature of the much-awaited document, one that flattered to deceive. Evidently, the ninth White Paper in independent India's history is proving to be no more that a futilitarian and unexciting non-event.

— SHEKHAR GUPTA



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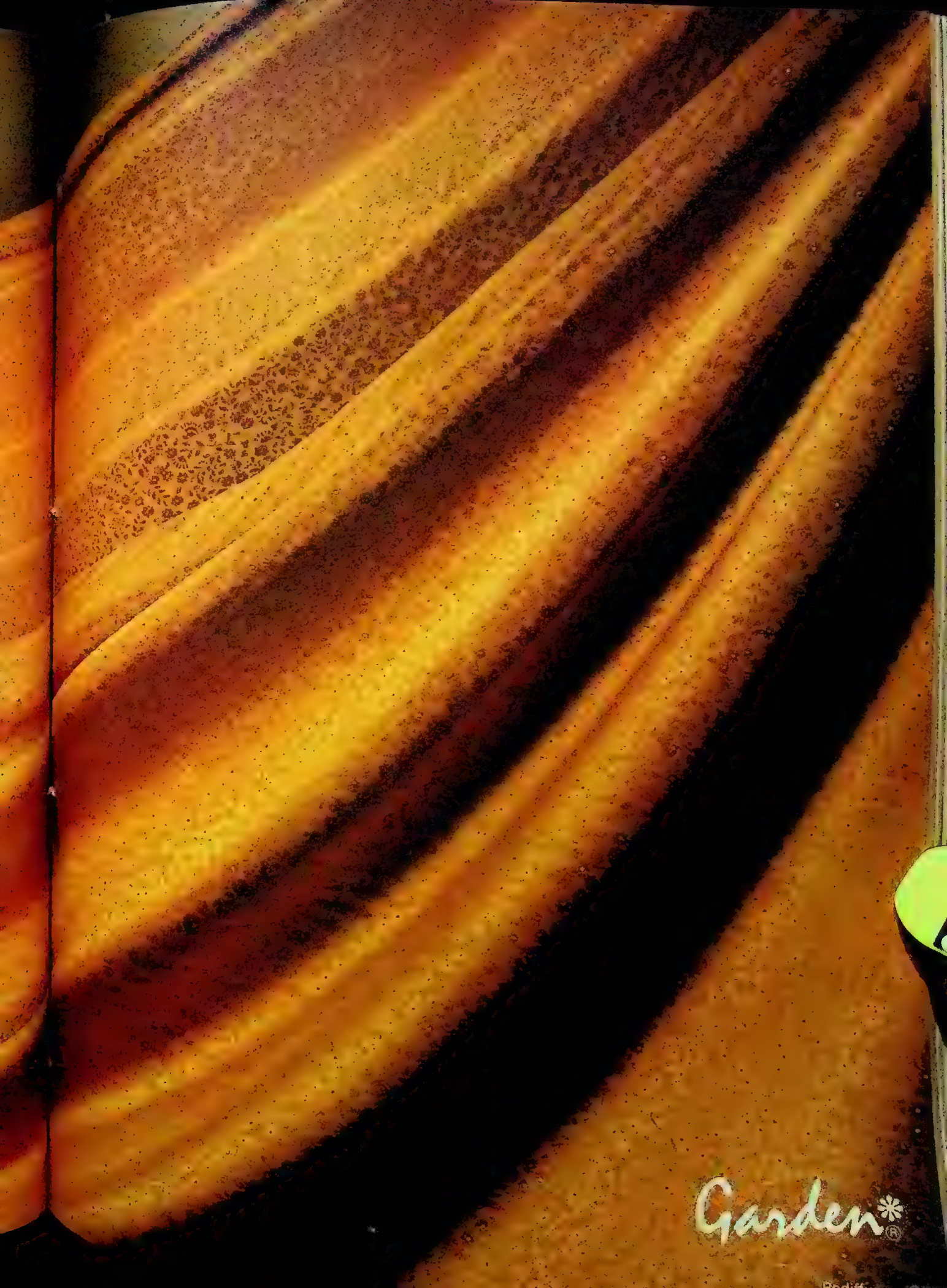
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TAMIL NADU

The Loan Risk



BANKING is rapidly becoming a high-risk profession if last fortnight's shocking incident in Tamil Nadu is any indication. Sheikh Sherbuddin, 26, an agricultural finance officer of the Central Bank of India was brutally stabbed to death in his office in Keezhalathur village by Perumal, an applicant for a self-employment loan under the Central Government's much publicised scheme. Sherbuddin's peon Selvadurai who tried to intervene was also stabbed and seriously injured.

The murderer was subsequently overpowered by local people and handed over to the police. But this was small consolation to his family, for whom he was the sole breadwinner. Said his distraught father: "We were planning to fix up Sherbuddin's marriage in the next few months, when this suddenly happened. We are very poor people, and my son was supporting the entire family."

The sequence of events leading to Sherbuddin's tragic murder began on June 26 when the Central Bank of India received a loan application for Rs 25,000 from Perumal, an unemployed matriculate from neighbouring Sembakuppam village. The application had been processed by the North Arcot branch of the District Industries Centre. When Perumal came to the bank on June 28 and asked for the loan, Sherbuddin explained to him that Sembakuppam village had been adopted by the Gudiyatham branch of the Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) and it was therefore the IOB which had to disburse the loan.

According to bank sources Perumal threatened Sherbuddin, saying: "I am coming back again at two in the afternoon. If my loan is not granted by then, you will be finished." Having said this the unemployed youth stalked out of the bank. Sherbuddin, naturally enough, did not take the threat seriously. But Perumal returned in the afternoon, and when he found his loan had not been sanctioned immediately pulled out a knife and kept his word with deadly effect.

Sherbuddin's murder was not an isolated incident of a bank officer being threatened to disburse a loan. A day earlier, a mob of about 50 persons reportedly belonging to the Congress (I) had stormed into the manager's room in a north Madras branch of the Canara Bank and threatened him. This crowd vociferously demanded immediate disposal of all pending loan applications under the differential rate of interest (DRI) scheme.

The Bankers Club of Anna Nagar in north-west Madras, a forum of managers of 30 commercial banks in the surrounding area, submitted a petition to the city police commissioner last fortnight seeking protection from loan seekers. The petition accused D. Mari, the president of one of the divisions of the Youth Congress(I), of threatening bank officials with dire consequences if loans were not sanctioned on his recommendations.

Says S.N. Kalyanaraman, a field officer attached to the United Commercial Bank: "It is now a continuous story of political pressure on field officers and bank managers to liberally dole out loans at nominal rates of interest to weaker sections. A Congress(I) member of the Legislative Council recommended a few loan applications to us. We found that these applicants had already received loans from the State Bank of Hyderabad.

"In another case", continues Kalyanaraman, "a Congress(I) MP recommended a self-employment loan for a person who we found was actually employed. We bankers are not against giving loans to poor people, but should we not verify the bona fides of the applicants to see if they are genuinely needy? How are we to work if we are continuously pressurised and bullied?"

Bank men are understandably furious with this state of affairs. And the brunt of their wrath is reserved for Union Deputy Finance Minister Janardhan Poojary. Addressing a loan mela organised by nationalised banks in Madras on June 25, the minister warned bank officers that "if you continue to demand securities and sureties for loans below Rs 5,000 given to the weaker sections, you will be sent back home". He charged that bank officers went out of their way to be soft to rich industrialists and landlords but came down harshly on the poor.

Bristling with indignation at Poojary's speech, a bank officer retorted: "The DRI loan scheme was not Poojary's invention . . . And we don't insist on securities or sureties for these loans. It is there in the guidelines that we should not. But should we not verify the credentials and check out the feasibility of the proposals of these people who come to us before giving them the money?"

"The problem in a nutshell," says V.K. Krishnamurthy, secretary of the All India Bank Officers Association, "is that this wild propaganda against bankers by Poojary has raised unreasonable expectations among lakhs of unemployed poor people. So when they do not get bank loans they conclude that bank officers are the real obstacles. It is against this background that Sherbuddin's murder has to be viewed. No wonder bank employees all over the country hold Poojary responsible for the murder."

Bank employees of Tamil Nadu are now preparing to stoutly resist the growing pressure of populist politics on their profession. All the employees of the Central Bank of India in the state observed a token strike on July 6, and processions were taken out on July 11. With the anger mounting, the Union Government will have to clarify if banking rules will continue to be flouted for political reasons and if bank officers will have to get their progress reports from ruling party workers.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

Murdered employee Sherbuddin; and bank office on protest strike: political victims





TRIPURA

Extreme Moves



THE FRAGILE peace of the last few months has come to an abrupt end, and panic is again in ascendancy in Tripura. Normal life came to a standstill last fortnight in Amarpur subdivision in south Tripura district with schools and offices remaining closed following a fresh outburst of extremist violence, which left 12 security personnel and three non-tribal traders dead. The armed extremists clearly belonged to the outlawed Tripura National Volunteer Force which has its headquarters in the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh just across the border.

The resurgence of violence has caught the state Government on the wrong foot, particularly since it came in the wake of the surrender of about 300 extremists belonging to the Binonda Jamatiya faction. In fact the authorities have deemed the area which was Binonda's stronghold relatively safe following his surrender. This assumption was strengthened by the arrest of Chuni Koloi, Binonda's arch rival in the underground and considered to be the real strongman in the outlawed force. Last fortnight's raids are believed to have been spearheaded by Koloi's right hand man, the self-styled Lieutenant Kartick Koloi in retaliation to the court's verdict sentencing Koloi to life imprisonment.

The two attacks on security personnel came within a span of a week and this despite the fact that immediately after the first incident, Chief Minister Nripen Chakravarti had ordered massive combing operations by both the state police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). However, not only did the administration fail to apprehend a single extremist but to add insult to injury the extremists attacked two police vehicles on their way from Ompi to Amarpur, killing four CRPF men, including an assistant commandant of the force, D.S. Kullar of the 13th battalion.

According to Chakravarti, the stepping up of extremist activities in the state was "a continuation of the game of destabilisation that some foreign powers had engineered first in Assam and then in Punjab". He claims to have documents showing that extremists are being aided by the Bangladesh Government. To add to this are reports that Bejoy Hrangkhawl, the principal extremist leader who escaped from custody last year, was at large again.



Nripen Chakravarti: passing the buck

Chakravarti also places part of the blame squarely on the Union Government for ignoring his advice to strengthen the Border Security Force (BSF) and CRPF personnel. Since the border areas run through difficult and largely inaccessible terrain, Chakravarti has constantly been requesting the Centre to improve communications in the area without which the task of checking illegal entry across the border is virtually impossible. But the Centre has so far paid not the slightest attention to the matter. An irate Chakravarti lashed out at the Centre: "The apathy was deliberate as the Centre wants to discredit the Left Front Ministry by making it appear that we are unable to maintain law and order in the state."



Bejoy Hrangkhawl: looming threat

The extremist attacks once again showed up the total lack of coordination among the three main law enforcing agencies: the BSF, CRPF and the state police. The BSF in Tripura has all along insisted that there is no influx of extremists from across the border and is consequently taken to task whenever any incident takes place. Last fortnight was no exception and as one police officer complained: "The task of manning the border is undoubtedly difficult, but then the BSF must also admit that it is not doing the job properly. In the past also they have always refused to take note of police intelligence reports indicating extremist movement across the border." He also felt that there was little coordination between the state police and the CRPF.

Since the beginning of the year, 32 security personnel have lost their lives in extremist attacks in Tripura. Last fortnight's incident was tailor-made for the state Congress(I) to demand the dismissal of the ministry and imposition of President's Rule. Said Ashok Bhattacharya, PCC(I) president, "This was done in Punjab, why not in Tripura?" This is exactly what the sizeable number of the Bengali population in Tripura also feels. They are yet to forget the violent massacre four years ago when armed tribals engaged in a cold-blooded carnage against the Bengali populace in Mandai. The insecurity of the Bengalis was heightened when leaders of that riot like Hrangkhawl and Jamatiya were treated leniently by the authorities and even resettled when they surrendered. Though this practice is common in Nagaland and Mizoram, in Tripura however the chief minister has been accused of using these extremists to further his own political ends.

Intelligence sources in Agartala further dismissed all rumours that the resettled extremists were taking advantage of their situation to aid those who were still underground. They conveniently explain it away saying that there was little love lost between the Kolois and Jamatiyas and the tension had reached a point where Binonda had to surrender to the police or risk attack by the Kolois.

However these explanations have done little to allay the growing fear in the state. The fact that the extremists have chosen security men as their target and are decamping with the arms of their victims, is seen as particularly ominous, for it seems to indicate a major offensive planned for the near future.

—SUMANTA SEN

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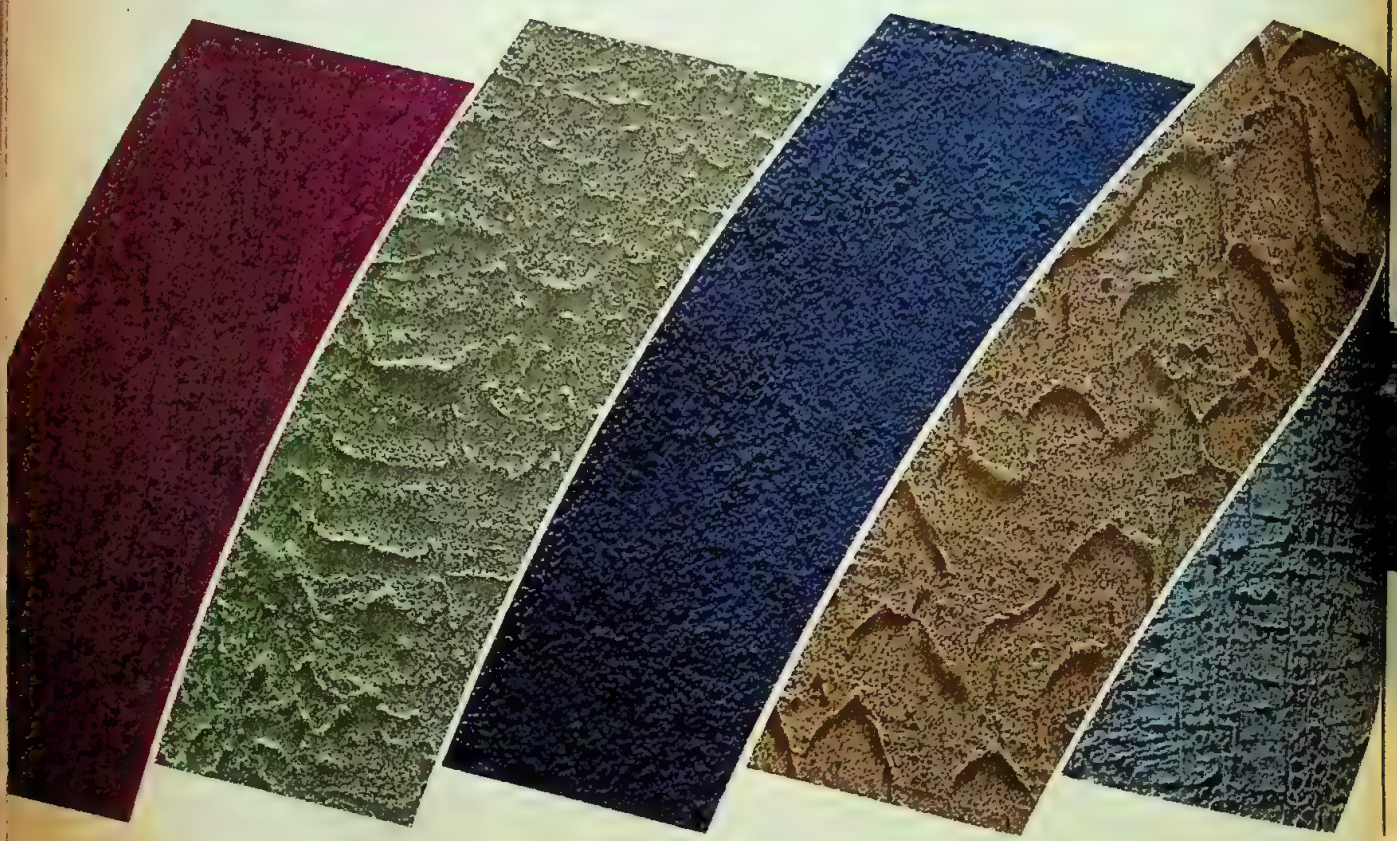
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GUJARAT

Uneasy Peace



GUJARAT Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki might ultimately end up as one of the few of his ilk to actually complete a term. But he will first have to survive the months ahead to earn that distinction. Early last fortnight, he and other senior state party leaders were summoned to a meeting in New Delhi with Congress(I) Party President Mrs Gandhi in a desperate bid to stave off a crisis of dissidence. Earlier last month, four senior ministers and an influential party leader had jointly handed in their resignations in protest against Solanki's "style of functioning". Finance Minister Sanat Mehta, Health and Civil Supplies Minister Madhavsinh Jadeja, Transport Minister Mohammed Surti, Deputy Minister for Education Balwant Munwar and south Gujarat leader and executive director of the 20-point programme, Jinabhai Darji, chose this drastic form of protest to call attention to their grievances.

Mrs Gandhi directed her party's general secretaries to refuse to accept their resignations, and in a one-hour meeting, desperately sought to make peace within her party's state unit. With the Congress (I) already knocked hard in the recent by-elections to Jetpur, wherein it lost to a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate, this growing rift between the chief minister and his dissidents could prove strategically very expensive for the party in view of the imminent general elections.

The dissidents could not score up any convincing points against Solanki, but they demanded that he be removed as he had failed to arrest the erosion of the party's image before the electorate. They complained that they were being alienated and given very little say in the running of the Government. Ironically, their demands included one asking for state party President Mahant Vijaydasji, who they said had no political image, to be replaced by former MLA Ghanshyam Pandit, who in fact is even lesser known.

For Solanki, there was little comfort in the meeting. He had failed to persuade the central leadership that the best way out was to drop the five dissidents. Earlier, by allowing Ratubhai Adani, a powerful Saurashtra leader, and Maganbhai Barot, a former Union minister, to leave the party and form the Rashtriya Congress in 1982, he had managed to reduce them to virtual nonentities. But this time, the strategy might not work. Darji is a respected Adivasi leader, and his aggressive implementing of the 20-point programme has won him a considerable following among the rural folk. Besides, Jadeja leads a powerful Kshatriya lobby, and the BJP would welcome him quite warmly if he decided to quit the Congress(I).





PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Solanki (top), Darji (above left) and Jadeja: widening rift

The present crisis really began four months ago when the dissidents held crowded public meetings in which they roundly criticised the Government. Darji declared at one of the meetings: "The Government has passed into the hands of capitalists, antisocial elements and black marketeers. We stand for values, and not in holding on to seats of power." The crowds cheered, but Solanki was hardly amused. His supporters held rival conventions in which they attacked the dissidents, reducing the whole fight to something of a slanging match. Rauf Valliullah, Congress(I) MP and a close confidant of Solanki, said caustically: "The party has suffered electoral losses in Surat, Baroda and Rajkot as all these are strongholds of the dissidents. They are in fact to blame. The only way to save the party in Gujarat is to remove them."

Another moment of high drama came last fortnight when Jadeja filed a writ petition against his own government, an unprecedented event. The health and civil supplies minister—an ex-prince of Rajkot—moved the Gujarat High Court for permission to sell his ancestral property to pay off his tax dues. The Government had not permitted him to do so when Jadeja was recently served with notice to pay Rs 5 lakh in income tax arrears. Jadeja argues that as he has no other sources of income, this is the only way he can meet payment. Last March, the Income Tax Department had auctioned off 74 plots in his possession to recover his unpaid dues of Rs 65.51 lakh (INDIA TODAY, April 15, 1983).

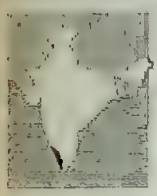
Solanki's argument was that "if permission is given to Jadeja, it will set a bad precedent". Instead, the revenue secretary asked the Income Tax Department to auction off part of his Ranjit Vilas Palace land to recover the dues— and not Darbagadh, which houses government offices. Now, faced with the notice to pay another Rs 5 lakh, Jadeja again appealed futilely to the Government. Said a bitter Jadeja: "I appealed numerous times, but since no heed was paid to my request which is only to pay my legal dues, I had to take recourse to the law." The case hasn't yet come up for hearing, but Jadeja's lack of affection for the Government is evidently well-entrenched by now.

As the state party leaders—both pro and anti-Solanki—trooped home at the close of the fortnight, it was clear that the Delhi meeting had resulted in no substantial change of heart. And with general elections close, the chief minister will have to exert every ounce of statesmanship to pull his party back from the brink of yet another political crisis.

—RAMESH MENON

KERALA

Timber Trouble



THE NELLIKUTHA reserve forest in Kerala's Nilambur forest range is ideal terrain for timber smugglers. Armed with guns, swords and acid bulbs they have been plundering the teak forest with impunity and little resistance from the inadequately armed forest guards. The problem is not a new one, it has only become more dangerous. M.M. Sahib the forester in charge has been writing for the past two years to the Kerala Forest Department seeking their help, but time and again his requests have been ignored. Last month, Sahib and his team of four forest guards went on a three-day lightning strike demanding among other things, armed protection from the smugglers. Said E.R. Mohandas, the Mallapuram district president of the Kerala Forest Protection Staff Association (KFPSA): "If the Kerala Government is not interested in protecting teak wood worth crores why should we risk our lives against this murderous gang with political protection."

Armed with only lathis, the forest guards have not been given even a motor cycle to patrol the 2,000 acre grade teak forest. Nor have they been provided with a wireless set to communicate with the Nilambur forest office 20 km away. Completely isolated, even the nearest police station is 7 km away in Vazhikadavu. "We were powerless to stop the timber smugglers exploitation," said Sahib helplessly. What seems more serious is that over the last six months three forest guards including Sahib have been seriously injured in clashes with the smugglers. To focus attention on their plight, the KFPSA decided in the last week of May to take action. The foresters strike came as quite a blow to the state's afforestation programme. To save face, the Government immediately ordered police protection for the foresters. "The social forestry schemes of planting saplings with such fanfare shows the hypocrisy of a government that cannot protect its own forests," a Friends of Trees Association member lamented.

Operating for so many years, the smugglers know when to strike and how to carry out their job. Under cover of darkness, about 50 armed men cross the Punnapuzha river, which borders the Nellikutha forest, in country made boats. Working with ropes and axes they are able to fell a tree in about 30 minutes. The logs are then transported down the river to the nearest saw mill in Vazhikadavu panchayat or sometimes taken to Kallai, about 90 km away in Calicut which is the country's biggest timber market.

The three saw mills situated almost on the boundary of the reserve forest are operating in contravention of a rule which says that no mill can operate within 8 km of a reserve. The Forest Department blames the Industries Department which issues licences for the lapse. Shrugging off their responsibility, K.P. Nooruddin the state forest minister said: "Obviously the Industries Department has not bothered to ask for our clearance."

Members of the KFPSA believe that the timber smugglers have become so daring because of the enormous political patronage they enjoy. The gang leader is a senior official of the Vazhikadavu panchayat and an active member of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). He is also a close associate of Seethi Haji the IUML MLA and timber tycoon. Foresters complain that MLA's stand guarantee for smugglers who have been arrested thus allowing them to remain outside the purview of the law.

Considering the profits—a log of one cubic metre of grade teak can fetch Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000 in Kallai—the extent of exploitation of the forests is not surprising. "Processing smuggled timber from forest reserves and making furniture out of them is the biggest cottage industry around the hilly and forested areas of Nilambur," says C.K. Kunjappan, a forest official attached to the Nilambur forest range. The timber smuggled from Nellikutha processed in saw mills which even work at night, are sold to furniture markets between Nilambur and Gudalur in Tamil Nadu. Occasionally lorry loads of timber transported without passes are confiscated by the forest department near Vazhikadavu, the only check post before the border. Last month when a similar raid took place, hostile locals, including women and children, surrounded the forest officials who were forced to leave. This attitude of the people to foresters is not surprising seeing that the entire economy of the area depends on smuggling. For, while the Government pays Rs 35 to a labourer for carrying logs, smugglers are willing to pay Rs 100.

Sahib and many other members of the KFPSA feel that Kerala's reserve forests should be taken over by the Central Government. They feel that the interests of the forests are being sacrificed to the survival of coalition governments in the state. Attempting to deny the charge, Nooruddin in defence said: "We have given adequate police protection to the foresters and very shortly more foresters would be sent there along with jeeps and wireless sets."

The smugglers meanwhile are getting more brazen in their attacks. In the last week of May they raided the Government dumping depot to reclaim the logs and trucks that were confiscated earlier. It is apparent that unless the Government senses the seriousness of the situation and acts immediately, the battle against the smugglers is going to be a long and costly affair. As Sahib said thoughtfully: "I want to finish off these smugglers but the Kerala Government should support me otherwise there will be no forest left."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

Confiscated teak logs and vehicles: unchecked exploitation



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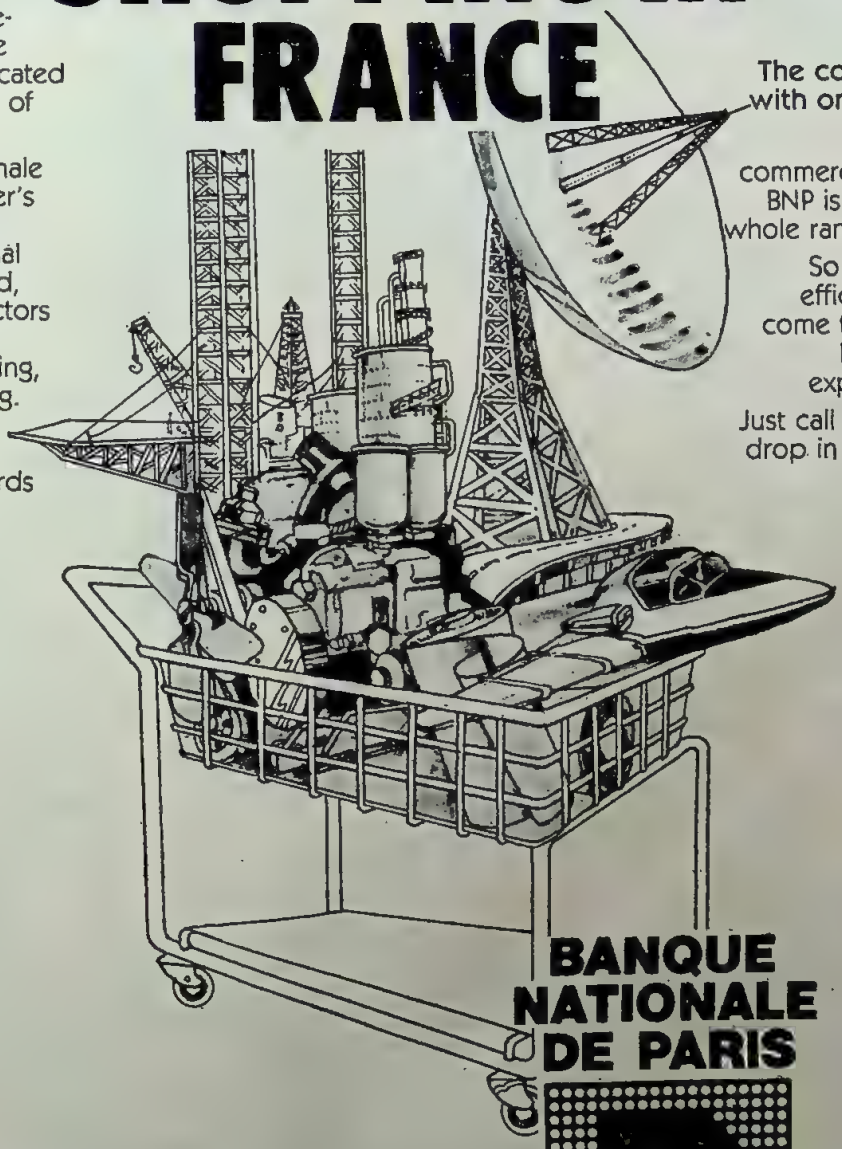
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WEST BENGAL

Congress Clash



A CRISIS of leadership seems to have seriously afflicted the Congress(I) in West Bengal. Despite the high command hinting at early parliamentary elections and asking senior leaders to assess candidates for the state's 42 Lok Sabha seats, the West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (WBPCC-I) has been unable to steer the party into the political forefront. A young MLA puts the blame for this squarely where he and many others in the party feel it rests when he says: "Congressmen in West Bengal have been reduced to puppets controlled by the opposing whims of two central ministers, Pranab Mukherjee and Ghani Khan Choudhury".

But it seems these two central ministers may have at long last perceived the dangers inherent in allowing the WBPCC(I) to drift—though that has not resolved any of their differences. The spur was provided by the events just prior to the Shibpur assembly by-election. Just two days prior to it, local politicians forced the Howrah district committee to award nominations for last fortnight's Howrah municipal poll. The Congress(I) lost the Shibpur election and the reason for this, says Youth Congress(I) leader Somen Mitra, was: "Those not given nominations (for the Howrah poll) just did not work for us."

The WBPCC(I)'s utter lack of control over the district committee was also proved by the final choice of nominations. These were the result of bargaining among different factions of the party. In the trading some extremely dubious candidates, including a notorious antisocial, found their way on to the list. Pranab Mukherjee does not deny these unseemly happenings, but maintains: "The decision to allow the district committee to nominate candidates was deliberate and conscious." Other leaders agree that local body elections should be left to the local organisation, but they point out that this does not mean that the state level leadership should have no supervisory powers.

Discontent against the PCC(I) has been seething since the beginning of this year. The Congress(I) legislature party of 56 MLA's has decided to revolt against the present pradesh committee by organising a major rally in Calcutta shortly to which none of the PCC(I) leaders will be invited.



BIKASH DAS



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Abdus Sattar (top) and Ray: leadership race

But the two central ministers have failed to provide an alternative leadership. Pranab Mukherjee, for one, continues to shore up the present committee because with its President Ananda Gopal Mukherjee incapacitated by illness, effective power lies with General Secretary Gopal Das Nag, a trusted lieutenant of the union minister. But Mukherjee hints at changes although he states: "What changes I can't say."

Choudhury, on the other hand, patiently awaits the day the state PCC(I) will perforce have to be changed. By all appearances, he holds the trumps, having lined up both the crucial frontline leaders—student and labour leader Subrata Mukherjee and Somen Mitra. The two central ministers and everybody else in the state unit of the party know that without these two frontliners there can be no effective PCC(I). All that remains is to find a pliable PCC(I) president, and the man who seems to fit the bill is Abdus Sattar, currently the leader of the opposition in the state Assembly. The other names the Union railway minister has suggested for the presidentship are Rauf Ansari and Mritunjoy Banerjee.

No matter which of the two Union ministers triumphs in this tug of war, it is doubtful that a revitalised PCC(I) will be the result. Although Mitra and Subrata Mukherjee are the two leaders indispensable for executing action programmes in the state their gaining total control over the West Bengal unit of the party will alienate another big faction in the state composed of those who now control the PCC(I) like Gopal Das Nag and Santosh Roy. Aware of the dilemma, the party high command has so far refrained from endorsing any of the proposals for a new pradesh committee.

There is one person most Congress(I) men in the state secretly admit can neutralise the machinations of the two central leaders and their followers and discipline the party. He is none other than the wily former chief minister of West Bengal and an outcast from the party, Siddhartha Shankar Ray. The former chief minister has been disconcerting Congress(I) leaders in the state by his persistent attempts to return to politics. Earlier this year, many in the party were worried by rumours of Ray floating a regional party in the state. Recently, his decision to contest the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat has dismayed several others.

Mrs Gandhi is reported to have asked Choudhury to assess the chances of Ray winning the Darjeeling seat. However, both the two central ministers are violently opposed to Ray's re-entry into the Congress(I). Despite that, Ray possibly offers the party what is quite literally the only ray of hope in a bleak electoral future.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

WEST BENGAL

Flood Failure

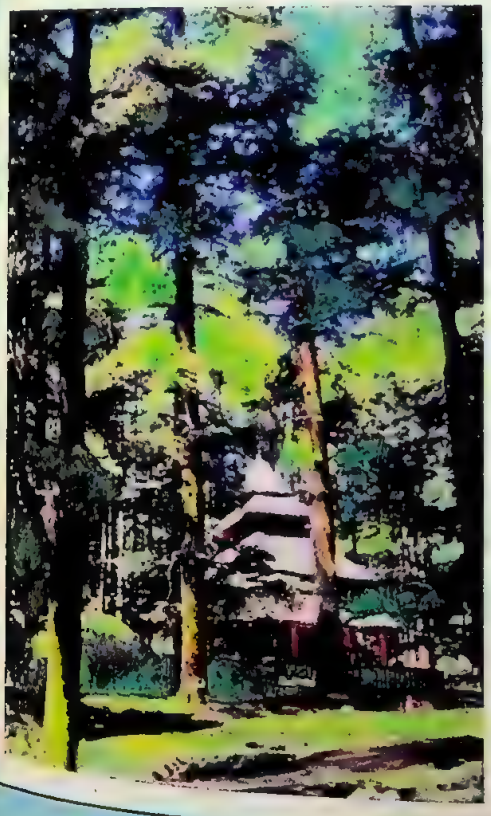
THE AGE old cycle of floods and drought appears to be gradually returning to the plains of southern West Bengal. Six years after the devastating floods of 1978, large parts of south Bengal once again went under vast tracts of water last fortnight. Rivers swollen with the first heavy monsoon showers breached embankments and surged into the paddy fields destroying crops and leaving thousands homeless.

The latest devastation has been accepted by many as yet another unkind act of nature and god. Far from being a pernicious act of nature, this is a result of the failure of schemes to control flooding. Few realise that some of the worst affected areas, both during this and the last,





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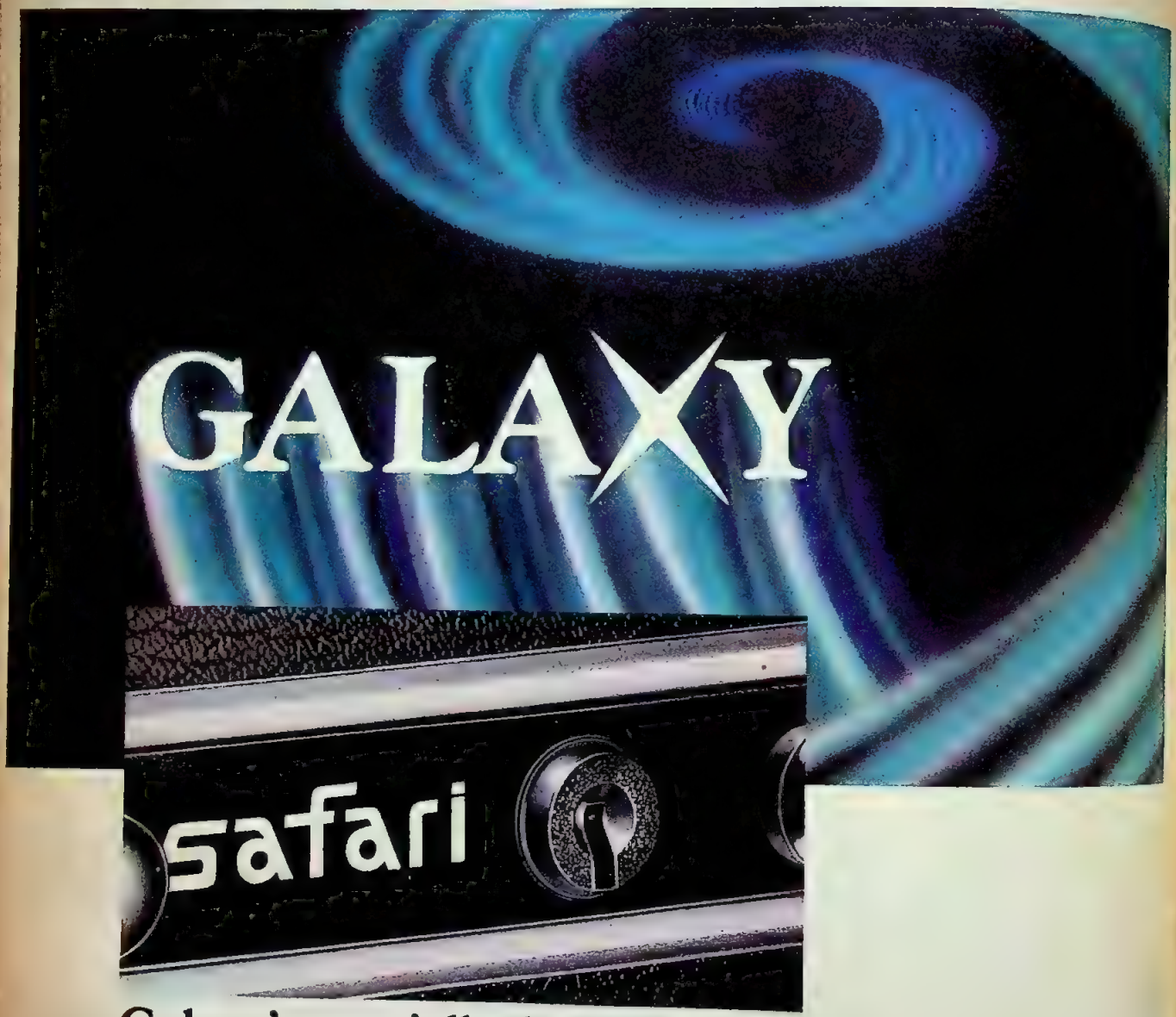
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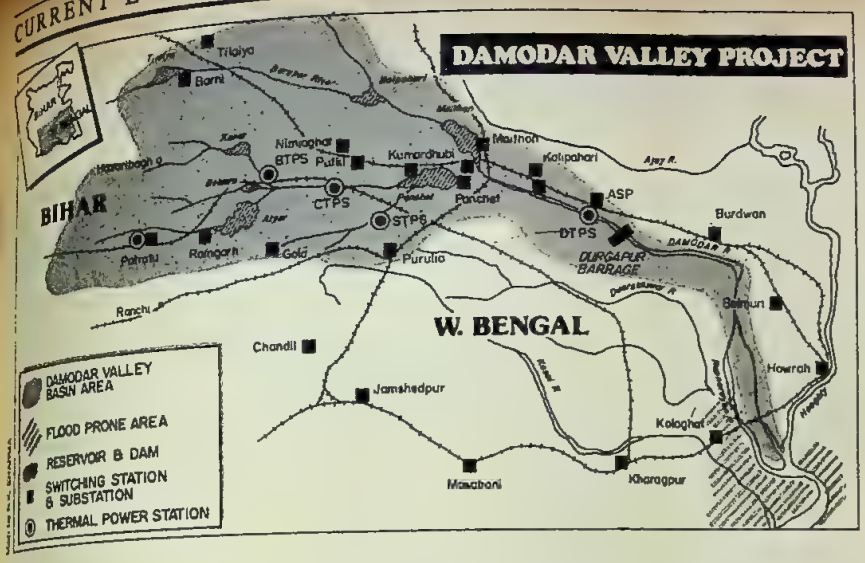
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floods, are areas purportedly under the purview of the state's flood control measures. People forget that the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC), established in 1948, had made flood control one of its principal objectives.

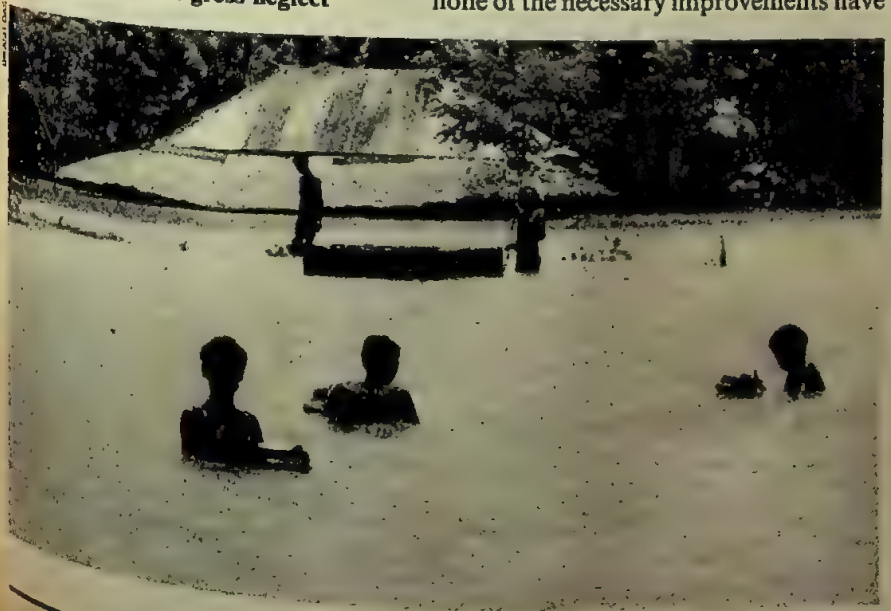
DVC authorities admit that floods have been recurring because the master plan to eliminate floods from the Damodar valley has only been partially implemented. W.L. Voorduin of the Tennessee Valley Corporation who had prepared the DVC master plan, envisaged the construction of a total of seven multi-purpose dams. Till today, only four—at Maithon, Panchet, Tilaiya and Konar—have been built. The fifth reservoir at Tenughat has no flood control functions.

Though Voorduin planned for a flood water reserve of 29.15 lakh acre feet, the four flood control reservoirs can theoretically hold back only about 15 lakh acre feet of water. Worse still is the failure of the DVC and the two state governments involved—West Bengal and Bihar—to properly execute the project. The catchment area of the dams is about 7.63 lakh acre feet—which is approximately only half their intended capacity.

In 1971 a committee headed by K.V. Srinivas Rao found that the drainage channels in the lower valley were not even capable of discharging 60,000 cusecs of water, which is just 30 per cent of the flow that was estimated by Voorduin. "In the times of the 10 major floods since 1958, DVC has been forced to release much more than 60,000 cusecs, and naturally on all these occasions water has breached the embankments of the lower Damodar valley," explained a DVC official.

Even though the West Bengal Government took over the maintenance of the lower valley channel system, which includes the Durgapur barrage, in 1964-65 none of the necessary improvements have

A flooded area: gross neglect





been made. This is in spite of having taken Rs 5.75 crore for maintenance purposes at the time of taking over. Also, aware of the inadequacies of the lower valley drainage system for over a decade, the state Government has done nothing to rectify the problem. "The drainage channels flowing into the Roopnarayan river are incapable of carrying the amount of water discharged by the DVC when there are heavy rains in the upper valley region," the chief engineer of the West Bengal Irrigation Department admitted. And though a three-stage project has been prepared, the Government says it does not have the funds to finance it.

This standard and often predictable excuse of inadequate funds is advanced as the reason why rivers like the Ajoy which washed away several villages in Birbhum district last fortnight remain uncontrolled. Every time it rains heavily in the Damodar valley and its adjoining areas, south Bengal becomes the victim and is submerged in flood waters.

Even though the DVC feels that it could flush the clogged channels by releasing 1 lakh cusecs of water, the state Government has so far refused permission. Senior state government officials during the recent floods blamed the DVC for discharging too much water. Riled by the Government's attitude DVC officials contend that without their flood control facilities, even the industrial townships of Durgapur and Asansol would have been washed away. Said one official: "We released only 1.67 lakh acre feet of water at a time when our two major reservoirs—Panchet and Maithon—had an inflow of 3.5 lakh acre feet."

It appears that under the existing conditions floods will be a seasonal phenomenon in south Bengal. "Rural settlements have come up in many of the river beds over the years but we have not been able to remove them," Nani Bhattacharya, the state irrigation minister, said trying to find reasons for the loss of lives and property in the floods. Attempting to solve the problem, DVC authorities have been urging the Government to build at least one more dam above Maithon at Balpahari. So far, neither the West Bengal Government nor the Bihar Government has shown any inclination to tackle the rapid deterioration of the Damodar valley water management system. Meanwhile, while they dally and debate, deforestation, soil erosion and siltation will continue to hamper the capacity of the Damodar valley to act as a buffer between heavy rains and floods.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

JYOTI BASU

Westward Ho!

WHAT do N.T. Rama Rao and Jyoti Basu have in common? Till recently the only thing was the fact that both are non-Congress(I) chief ministers. Now, however, it transpires that both have the same approach to getting funds for industrial development in their states. Like Rama Rao, Jyoti Basu will also spend the major part of July in touring Canada and the UK in a bid to get industrialists there to invest in West Bengal.



Jyoti Basu: America bound in search of capitalist investment

A lot of hush-hush surrounds Basu's North American journey as presumably the ruling Marxists feel they should play down the fact that help for industrial growth is being sought from that arch-enemy, the cigar chomping American capitalist. Neither Jyoti Basu nor his party colleagues have said anything beyond a vague announcement that the trip was in "response to some invitations from Bengalis staying in the US and Canada". Initially it was also announced that Basu's trip was an unofficial one, implying that all his travel expenses would be borne by the people inviting him, but last fortnight the finance department admitted that costs would be borne by the state.

Inquiries by INDIA TODAY, however, have revealed that the American trip is basically the brainchild of some senior Bengali executives of multinational companies based in Calcutta. One of these executives, who insisted that he remain anonymous, said: "We feel that the chief minister's trip to the US and UK can be helpful to the state so we got him to agree to this and we are arranging meetings with industrialists there." These executives have also arranged with their parent companies to be present abroad during Basu's visits so as to be on hand while he tries to sell West Bengal to organisations like, for instance, the Confederation of British Industries, the English equivalent of the Association of Chambers of Commerce.

Non-resident Indians like doctors and scientists from West Bengal who have made good in the States will also be asked to play their role. According to those behind the trip: "These non-residents have made a pretty pile for themselves and it should be possible to interest them in investing a part of their savings in West Bengal, particularly in the sphere of electronics which the state Government has been trying to promote."

Jyoti Basu will be the first communist leader from India to visit the US. There has been no problem over the visa even though Basu had stated categorically, "I am a communist", while filling in the visa form. However, according to reliable information, the Americans had made a discreet suggestion, which was accepted, that while in the US he would not deliver any speeches of a political nature or engage in any political activity that might prove embarrassing for a nation always on the look-out for reds under the bed.

When asked whether this was not an embarrassing compromise for a Marxist leader, a CPI(M) member parried the question with the counter query: "Why should his trip to the USA create such a lot of noise? Did not Karl Marx himself send a message to Abraham Lincoln congratulating him on the abolition of slavery?" Basu was more forthright. When asked whether he would meet leaders of the American Communist Party, he replied: "We have no connections with them," making it clear that during the visit politics would definitely be out in any talks that take place.

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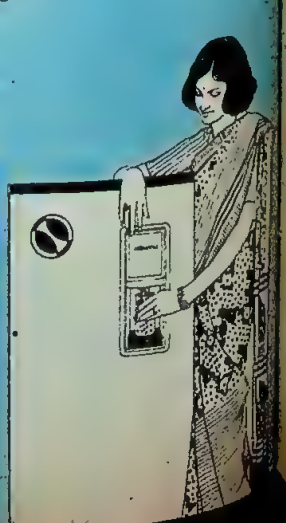
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BIHAR

The Survival Stakes



WILL he or won't he survive? That tantalising question regarding Bihar Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh continued to haunt the corridors of power in Patna last fortnight. Certainly, Singh, who is due to complete one year in office next month, faces the most aggressive dissident campaign launched against him so far. Early last fortnight, the dissidents led by former chief minister, the redoubtable Jagannath Mishra met in camera to draft a resolution damning Singh's "non-political functioning". They vociferously demanded the removal of the chief minister. "It is time we took the final step to save the party and the state during the crucial year of the elections," said Kamantah Singh Thakur, Mishra's alter ego. He added determinedly that a delegation would soon fly to New Delhi to meet Mrs Gandhi, and explain the situation to her.

Frequent lobbying in the capital by dissident groups from various states is common enough, but this time, there is a sense of urgency in the affairs of the Congress (I) in Bihar. The party's central leadership at least, sensed trouble and summoned both the Governor, A.R. Kidwai and Abdul Ghafoor, a former chief minister known for his "clean" reputation, for urgent consultations. On July 7, a day after the dissidents met, Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee dashed to Patna to take a look at the situation.

Matters really came to a head when Singh's supporters rallied around with a signature campaign seeking to establish confidence in the chief minister's leadership and demand the expulsion of Mishra from the party. But this move proved controversial: Mishra's men immediately complained that some of them had been forced to sign the memorandum expressing confidence in Singh. More sensational claims followed: Mangat Insan, a legislator from Purnea district claimed he had been "kidnapped" just as he was preparing to leave for the dissidents' meeting. He added that a few days earlier, he had been taken by some ministers to the chief minister's house where he was made to sign the memorandum against his will.

Mahachandra Prasad Singh, MLC, who along with former minister Raghunath Jha has been suspended for "anti-party activities", charged that in fact nearly half a dozen legislators had been kidnapped—including Fakir Chand Ram, Jai Kumar Palit, Ramchandra Mishra and Chandrika Pandey. Singh disclaimed any knowledge of even the signature campaign. "This is false," he claimed. "There is no such campaign."

Whatever the truth of that, Mishra has evidently been working towards a show-down with Singh, whom he calls a "colourless bureaucrat". The chief minister retorted: "Let him and his supporters speak of a show-down. I do not take notice of such utterances." He added that Mishra was "mentally upset" ever since he was asked to quit the chief ministership. But the canny Brahmin from Mithila might be gaining ground: during the past 10 months, he addressed 80 public meetings across the state, coming into contact with over 3 million people.

Congress (I) observers, however, believe that Mishra might be trying to force a split. Singh himself says: "There is a general impression that he will leave the party." Counters Mishra: "I am not going to quit the party, let them (the leaders) take action or expel me." He claims rather piously that his only aim is to widen the base of the party and strengthen the hands of Mrs Gandhi.

Meanwhile, the defiant former chief minister appears to be getting more popular within the party. Kamalnath Thakur claims that 90 legislators attended the dissidents' meeting on July 6—a figure hotly contested by Singh's men. Mishra says jubilantly: "I have no ambition to come back to power, but I am proud that I have the people's love and sympathy." But the chief minister apparently does not feel threatened. He says: "Let him take the next step (to quit the party) and then he will know his real strength."

The former chief minister's campaign against Singh got even more intense when Mishra's blue-eyed boys, Raghunath Jha and Mahachandra Prasad Singh were suspended from the party. A meeting was called on June 18, where the first call for the removal of Singh went up. Mishra believes that his men are being weeded out of the organisation, and his programmes are either being curtailed or reversed in an attempt to humiliate him.

To prove his point, he says that there are parallel district committees functioning in at least eight districts of the state—one recognised by the All India Congress Committee (I) and the other by the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee (I). Also, Mishra adds, the state party executive has met just once in January with the result that there is no forum for partymen to air their grievances, and the chief minister has been unable to even nominate the Congress (I) Legislature Party executive. "Let Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv withdraw their umbrella from over Singh, and he will find that none is with him," concluded Mishra grimly.

While allegations and charges flew thick and fast, some observers believe the state could well be in for a spell of President's rule. Meanwhile, however, with almost the entire party joining in the free-for-all, the state administration has ground to a virtual standstill.

—FARZAND AHMED



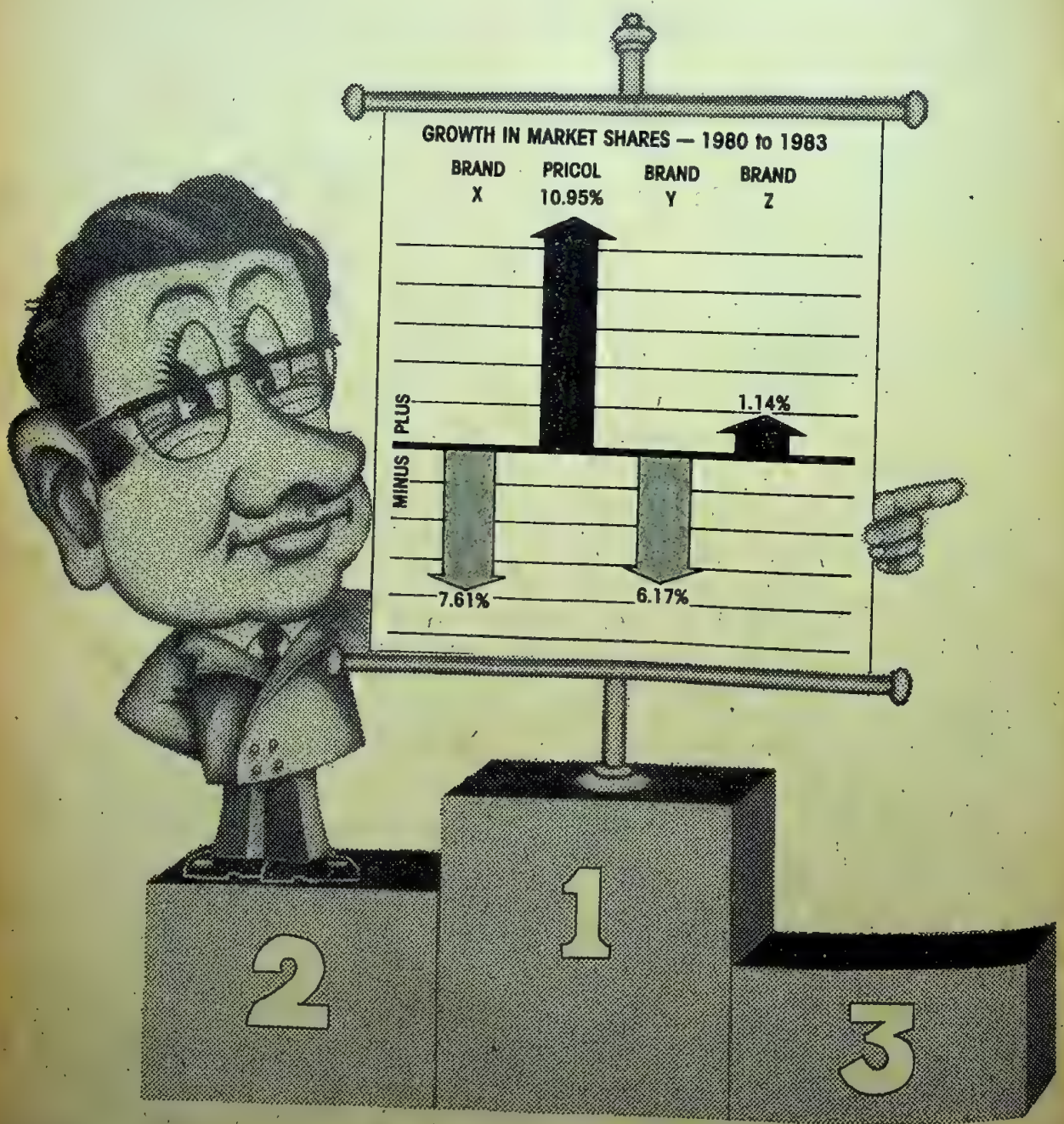
"Mishra is mentally upset."
—CHANDRASHEKHAR SINGH

"Singh is a colourless bureaucrat."
—JAGANNATH MISHRA

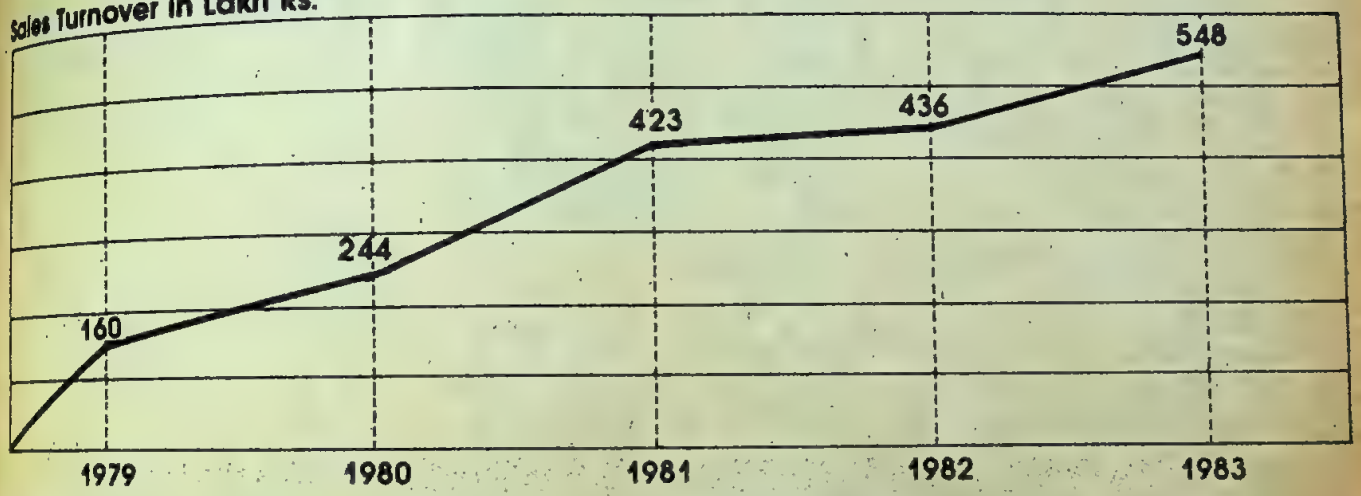


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MAHARASHTRA

Decisive Crackdown



CHIEF Minister Vasantdada Patil has proved that even politicians occasionally live up to their word. When urged by a BJP delegation to arrest suspected criminals and offenders in Kherwadi, who were active in the communal riots which flared up again last month in parts of Bandra, Patil's response was an enigmatic "Wait till after July 2." And Patil astonished everyone when, in addition to a major crackdown, two days after Id, 18 alleged smugglers including kingpins like Haji Mastan and Karim Lala were rounded up under the National Security Act (NSA).

The arrests were all the more surprising since the elusive Mastan, Lala and Yusuf Patel, who had earlier escaped the police dragnet by fleeing to Gujarat, have become not just socially acceptable but also wield considerable political clout. Police sources also insist that the All India Peoples Secretariat (AIPS), founded by Mastan, and of which Patel is a director and Lala is a chief financier, has been involved in the rioting in Bombay.

Police are of the strong opinion that the May riots in Central Bombay were premeditated since trouble in the form of throwing glass bottles and disruption of traffic erupted almost simultaneously in 16 spots the day after the Bhiwandi communal disturbance. To add to their theory, the police last month intercepted a message between two smugglers which led to the recovery of a crate of molotov cocktails. Another message which fell into police hands was to a foreign country asking for arms. And on June 27, the interrogation of two men arrested while awaiting a bomb delivery on Vikhroli platform led to the arrest of Dr Ibrahim Merchant, secretary of AIPS and six other employees of the organisation.

The arrests greatly relieved most Bombayites who have long felt that the city was being virtually run by gangsters and smugglers. Nor did the arrests lead to the kind of widespread resentment the earlier arrests of some Shiv Sainiks had created. The only reaction came in Muslim populated areas of Central Bombay, such as Mohammed Ali Road, Nagapada, Agripada, Dongri and Pydhonie, where shopkeepers organised a near-total bandh in protest. Said Khan Wahid Ali, a travel agent from Muzaffir Khana, where Mastan had worked as a coolie in the past, "Some people call them smugglers, some call them leaders. It is clear that they are just being made scapegoats." Ali, a member of the local peace committee, claims to have sought Mastan's advice during the riots, but had found Mastan unwilling to tangle with the police. Ali's companions Syed Hussaini and Maqbool Alam expressed bitter resentment that even now when bottles keep flying from the Hindu side of Pydhonie, the police don't so much as lift a finger.

The secretariat office wears a deserted look now, for as a neighbouring barber explains, "All the employees have been locked up by the police." The office used to double as a medical centre in the afternoons where people could avail of



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Mastan (left) and Yusuf Patel: influential connections

BOMBAY

Building Plots

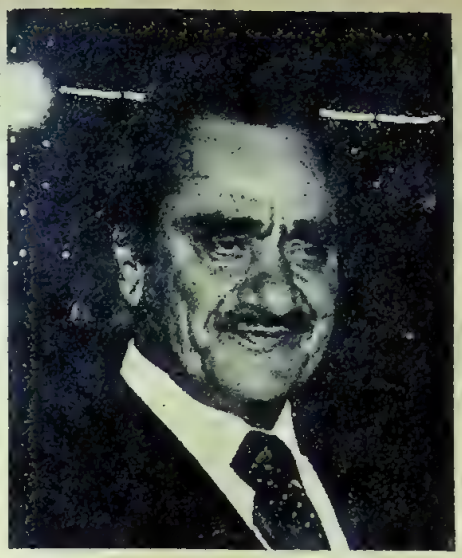
IN THE Maharashtra IAS cadre, Arun Bhatia, 41, the collector of Bombay has a reputation of being a trouble-maker which is why he has never remained in a posting for more than a year. His tenure as collector, Alibagh, ended abruptly when he offended ONGC by slapping a huge fine for illegal quarrying (INDIA TODAY, September 30, 1983) and alienated the local MLA, D.N. Patil by challanging his salt mines (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1983) As collector, Dhule, he was removed after he discovered a racket siphoning off funds from the employment guarantee scheme by undeserving candidates with political pull. Last fortnight, Bhatia failed to celebrate his first anniversary as collector of Bombay, being summarily transferred as joint secretary in the Home Department. Remarked the state Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil about his new post: "Let Bhatia make as much mischief there as he wants."

What Patil views as mischief,

medicine and injections at a nominal fee. If two youths, Suhail Khan and Afiz, who maintained that they were social workers at the secretariat were to be believed, then the secretariat has done much public service by way of providing grain and cooked food in Thane and Bhiwandi to the riot victims.

Despite such loyalty, the gaunt 63-year-old Mastan, when taken into custody, blamed his troubles on a few antisocial elements among his staff members. The arrest is a big come-down for Mastan who prides himself on his connections with the right people. In fact, at the inauguration of a branch of his secretariat at Dharavi, actor Dilip Kumar had remarked, "Whenever our society has problems, Haji sahib has come to their help." Mastan, who like Patel had publicly renounced smuggling before Jayaprakash Narayan, was once even quoted as having arrogantly remarked, "The politicians who abuse me by day come to me with a begging bowl at night." All along Mastan has made it a point to remain in the limelight by actively participating in various social welfare organisations, where he rubs shoulders with actors, politicians and other respectable citizens.

If Mastan's life-style is impressive,



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Karim Lala: lavish life-style

Karim Lala's is no less. Lala who allegedly controls a massive extortion, drug and protection racket, in addition to smuggling, has in the past hosted veteran freedom fighter Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and has shared a platform with no less than Mrs Gandhi. A self-styled Pathan leader, he devotes much of his time to his organisations like the Khudai Khidmatgar and Paktoonistan Jirga-e-Hind.

Patel, too had a lucrative business going when, after abandoning smuggling, he had entered the building industry. His company, Patel Brothers Construction Corporation, developed to perfection the technique of evicting tenants after acquiring real estate in prime parts of the city. Patel, however, found himself in hot water last week when a case was registered against his company for conspiring in the forging of city survey land register records and illegally obtaining extra floor space index (FSI). The firm is, in fact, involved in five cases where it has utilised crores of rupees worth of FSI. The case has, however, been registered only after a month-long pressure from Bombay Collector, Arun Bhatia, who, strangely enough, was summarily transferred from his job last week (*see box*).

But on the whole things seem to be looking up for Bombayites, for police say that a case against Bal Thackeray charging him with instigating communal hatred, is to be registered shortly under Section 153(A) IPC. The decisiveness with which the law is moving of late in Maharashtra is hopefully an indication of better things to come.

—COOMI KAPOOR

others see as yeoman service in bringing corruption to light. In what has come to be known as the FSI (floor space index) scandal (INDIA TODAY, February 15, 1984), certain builders in Bombay were found to have increased the area of their plots on paper in connivance with either the staff of the collector's office or the municipality and in the process made buildings worth crores in the extra covered area.

The original 43 cases of forgery in the collector's office were discovered before Bhatia took charge last July by Manmohan Singh, his predecessor. Singh referred them to the anti-corruption branch which however slept over the matter. Bhatia, in an attempt to get them to move tried to register 12 FIR's in instances where the excess FSI had been utilised. The police refused to register the cases. Unperturbed, Bhatia continued with investigations. The result was that fresh cases of unauthorised FSI utilisation kept coming out in the press to the embarrassment of the Government and the corporation. Like Pinocchio's nose, the FSI scandal seemed to grow and grow much beyond the original 43 cases.

Last month at least three more cases were discovered by the collector's office:



Bhatia: transferred yet again

► Arihant, a 12 storey-building is nearing completion on Warden Road, even though the plot on which it is constructed had already consumed its entire FSI in the construction of the mammoth Tirupati apartments which is also on the same plot. The illegal 73,000 extra square feet gained by the builder works out to a cool Rs 10 crore.

► A 24 storey Pratibha Cooperative Housing Society building off Warden Road had consumed 27,000 extra square feet working out to Rs 3 crore.

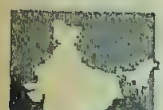
► Om Chambers, a completed building near Kemps Corner had built two extra floors by increasing on paper the size of its plot by 562 square yards.

Whether Bhatia's replacement D.T. Joseph, who had performed stellar work in clearing up the Bombay University examination system will be able to continue investigations in view of the cover-up operation at work, remains doubtful. Last fortnight, for example, the municipal corporation after six months of procrastinating finally supplied the collector's office a list of building applications made during the last five years. But the key column which lists the area of the plots for which FSI had been claimed, is missing. Even the chief minister's own partyman Murli Deora, president of the Bombay Congress(I) committee, is sceptical of the state's bona fides in bringing the culprits to book, and last week demanded that the cases be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigations.

—COOMI KAPOOR

KARNATAKA

Communal Brinkmanship



LITTLE Sanjay Torhat, two-and-a-half years old, was the unwitting cause of the third outbreak of communal violence this year in Hubli, Karnataka. Last month just before the election to the legislative council, the boy was hurt when the stationary autorickshaw he was holding on to in the Kamaripet area suddenly began moving. For the Muslim driver of the autorickshaw who found himself trapped in a neighbourhood strongly influenced by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), however, the consequences were far worse. That he was transporting voters for the Congress (I) candidate in the election did not go over very well with the pro-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Hindus of the Pattegar community in the area either, and he was beaten and seriously injured.

The events ensuing over the next two days left four persons dead and 15 injured in a Bhiwandi-style stabbing spree. The happenings were a disturbing sequel to two other communal clashes in March and May which had left 12 persons dead —eight of them in police firing. Dozens more had been injured and property worth Rs 75 lakh destroyed. In the earlier riots, houses and shops of particular individuals were chosen for looting and burning, while in the latest violence a Hindu trader with strong RSS connections was fatally stabbed. These incidents left no doubt that targets for violence were deliberately chosen.

Peace efforts began when Mayor S.S. Yavagal of the Janata Party, his councillors and prominent Hindus of the city braved heavy rain to participate for the first time in Ramzan prayers. And city elders under the guidance of the head priest of the Moorusavira Math are also trying to bridge the communal gap. But the basic issues have remained unsolved since the first outbreak of communal violence in 1969, followed by another in 1972, after which the Centre classified Hubli as an area of endemic communal tension. But in all these years the two communities have not come any closer.

The Muslims and the Pattegars, who are Kshatriyas originally from central India, share the same neighbourhoods. This is the case in all the three known trouble spots—Kamaripet, Baklegalli and Channapet. In Baklegalli, for instance some Pattegars live in houses surrounded by those of Muslims. The narrow, dirty roads here are so congested that they are perpetual traffic nightmares. Not surprisingly there are countless minor irritants which can snowball into major incidents when the communal climate deteriorates.

Three main points of discord are usually cited as the reasons for the ill will between the two communities. These are:

- the Anjuman-e-Islam's plans to construct a shopping complex on the Idgah Maidan, a prime plot of land in the heart of the city, were stopped by the Pattegars through a court case;
- plans to build a fence around the Torvihakkal Muslim burial ground were stalled after being challenged in court, again by the Pattegars;
- the ownership of a place of worship beside the Idgah Maidan sacred to both the communities is claimed by both. A private suit by a Pattegar timber merchant regarding a dargah on his tenancy has only added fuel to the fire.

Other factors also contribute to each community's resentments. During the Holi festival, says Anjuman President

K. BHANUMATHI





Hubli Muslims at prayer (top) and the ruins of a house burnt in the May 1984 riots

T.A.M. Hindasgeri: "Muslims always complain to us that drums are deliberately beaten outside mosques, particularly in tense spots." Hubli boasts of 52 mosques and 51 dargahs, some very close to each other, and the chances of disturbing people in them are correspondingly high. Another reason for violence is that certain volatile sections of both communities indulge in illegal activities and their leaders tend to tread on each other's toes.

While the efforts of Janata Industry Minister S.R. Bommai, elected from Hubli rural constituency, and of the police have been termed inadequate by the opposition particularly the Congress(I), the Government has strengthened the police force in the city. But mere policing is not likely to solve anything. Said a senior police official: "Policing is a negative concept in such matters. Unless the real issues are solved, the truce arrived at can only be temporary." Bommai, however, says the latest violence "was not really a communal riot but only a gang war between antisocial elements".

Many of the townspeople voice strong criticism against the police for their failure to arrest those who were in the forefront of the violence. Many of these men are said to be prominent citizens. Deputy Superintendent of Police B.G. Dastikop says the police had jailed 358 antisocial elements. But points out Deputy Inspector General of Police (Northern Range) B.M. Yeshwantgol: "Arresting the top leaders can also be very provocative." A Congress(I) leader, however, alleged that "the Janata did not arrest the ringleaders for fear of the political fall-out".

Where the sympathies of various political parties lie is obvious. Says BJP MLA Jartarghar from Hubli city: "The Janata Government is the first to give Muslims a medical college, a long-standing demand of theirs. They are a pampered lot." Counters Congress (I) leader Gopinath Sandra: "Jartarghar's election slogan this time was 'Save Hinduism, vote BJP'. Now the Muslims are with us."

Defeated MLA and CPI corporator A.J. Mudhol says he has sent a memorandum to the chief minister seeking the immediate convening of tripartite talks to settle disputes as he says: "Peace committees have never achieved anything concrete so far". Whatever the methods adopted to convert Hubli into a safer city, unless they are matched by genuine concern and open minds on the part of the city's warring communities, the innocent will continue to suffer.

—K. BHANUMATHI

BELGAUM

Name Game

NAMES matter in politics, even if of the dead. Last fortnight Belgaum, the border city 74 km from Hubli in Karnataka, witnessed a curious feud over the names of two very dead men. The Muslims of the area and a small group of Hindu youths of the Hindu Ekta Andolan were locking horns over the naming of an unimpressive traffic intersection after Hindu hero Veer Savarkar instead of Pakistan's founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

The hotly disputed territory is officially known as Pimpalkatta Chowk—after a peepul tree that once grew there. But it is more popularly known as Jinnah Chowk. A name-plate proclaiming this was affixed by some townsmen in a corner of the traffic island after Jinnah spoke at the spot in February 1937 during the freedom struggle.



K. BHANUMATHI

The disputed chowk: a curious feud

Trouble began when the newly-formed Hindu Ekta Andolan decided in 1982 that it was high time Jinnah's name was given a burial and presented a memorandum with this demand to the deputy commissioner. He ordered removal of the name-plate and advised the Muslims to come up with an alternative Muslim leader's name. Three were duly submitted, those of Maulana Azad, Tippu Sultan and Abdul Hameed. But soon after, the Andolan decided to commemorate Savarkar's birth centenary celebrations by naming the chowk after him, but the state Government remained unresponsive to the idea.

Till 1983 nothing happened. Then the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (which backs the Andolan) gained supremacy in elections to the city corporation and passed a resolution on that year conceding the demand. Quick to react, protesting Muslim corporators went to Bangalore and obtained a stay from the Government.

An Andolan delegation followed close on the Muslim delegates' heels and appealed to Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde. As nothing happened till June 23 Andolan President B.G. Patil decided he and another member would go on a hunger-strike from June 25 to protest against the stay. But they were given no chance to begin as the police locked them both in judicial custody.

The Andolan also called off a bandh for the day after Ramzan. Nonetheless, Mayor Subhash Ramachandra Jadav defended the controversial corporation resolution. Said he: "According to the Corporation Act, government permission is required only if a chowk is to be renamed. Here since no name is registered in the corporation records, we have a right to go ahead with the naming."

Not surprisingly, the matter has degenerated into a prestige issue. According to Andolan activist Suryanath Shanbagh: "If Muslims' arguments against Savarkar are valid, we are ready to withdraw our demand. But the Muslims have never specified their objections to Savarkar, who was not anti-Muslim."

The Muslims have not sought to answer all the Andolan objections because they feel it is not truly representative of general Hindu sentiment. Police Superintendent S.T. Ramesh asserts that the Andolan has a following of only about 70 persons. But the communal powder keg has a short fuse and, tragically enough, all that is needed to set off another communal conflagration is one small spark.

—K. BHANUMATHI

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UTTAR PRADESH

Fast Work



FEW PEOPLE can deny that Maneka Gandhi is fast on the political draw and last fortnight demonstrated that quite literally when she staged a dramatic, if short-lived, fast unto death in Jagdishpuri in Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur district. As a measure of political opportunism, the drama was typical of the gutsy Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM) leader who had the management of the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) factory in a panic.

Normally, this area of the state is witness to little excitement despite its proximity to Amethi. Which is why BHEL officials were totally flummoxed when Maneka and other RSM workers descended on the factory, and announced that they were on a fast until their demands had been met. The demands included the immediate payment by BHEL of compensation to families whose land had been acquired to set up the factory and the providing of jobs to locals regardless of their political affiliations. District Magistrate Gopal Das Mehrotra was hurriedly summoned. After hasty consultations with BHEL officials he informed the protesters that compensation had been paid to all except six people and that would be cleared in three days.

The RSM leaders, however, claimed to have 30 applications from people who had not been paid the compensation. While the stalemate continued, word of the fast spread like measles and soon a steady stream of villagers from around the area arrived at the spot, all armed with applications for jobs and the venue was soon transformed into a mini-employment exchange. Maneka and her lieutenant, Akbar Ahmed, revelled in the embarrassment they were causing the state Government, and the political mileage it was undoubtedly giving them. Said Bakridi of Kamrauli village: "Indiraji's daughter-in-law has come to give us jobs." Added Chauhana, 70, from Madhupur: "We are not bothered about who she is, only with getting jobs."

Equally concerned, though for different reasons, was the Congress(I). Sanjay Singh, minister of state for forests, and Pravin Kumar Sharma, minister of state for transport, arrived to take stock of the situation which took an ugly turn when Youth Congress(I) workers clashed with the RSM group leaving at least 50 injured. Police quickly brought the riot under control but Maneka stuck to her guns regarding the fast. Even a sudden shower failed to dampen RSM spirits.

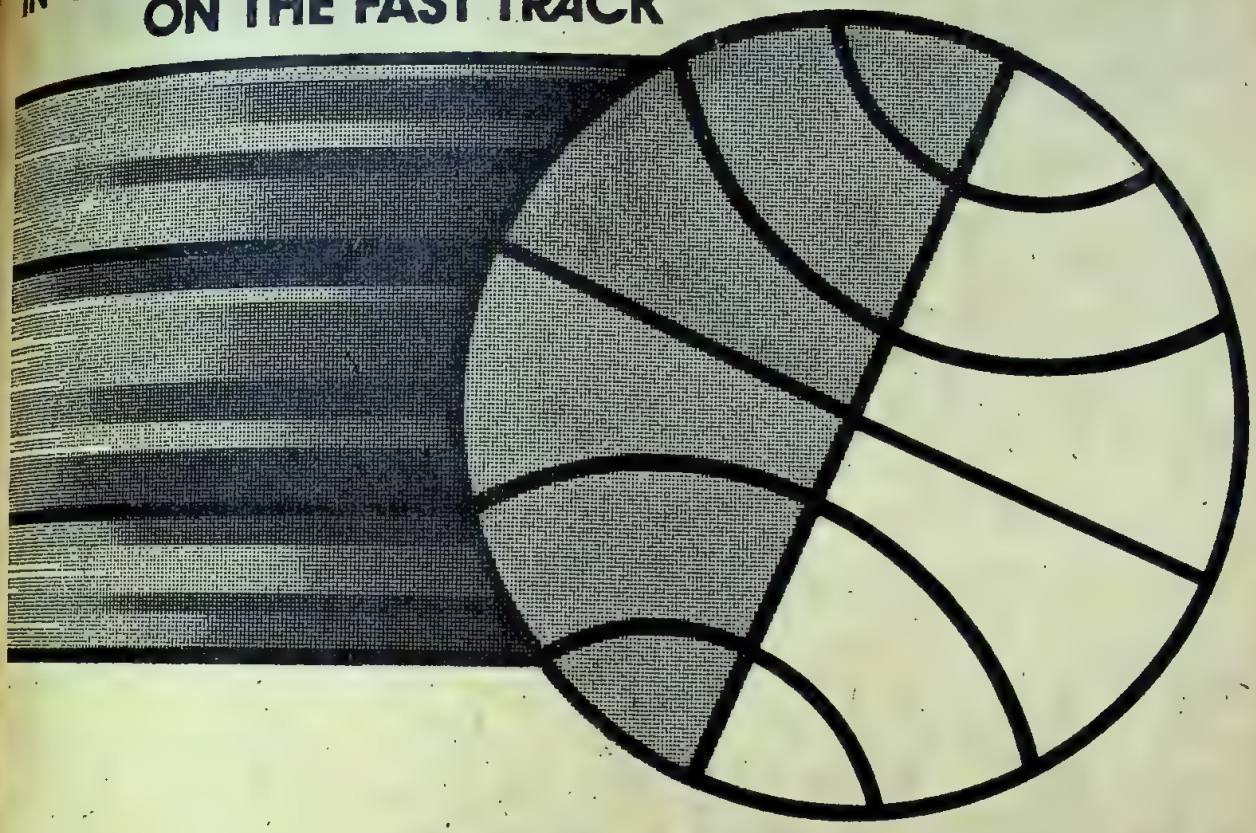


Maneka and RSM women workers on fast outside BHEL factory: political mileage

Meanwhile, rumours started circulating that truckloads of RSM workers were on their way to the BHEL factory. Whatever the truth, it did have the desired effect. Officials quickly arranged a meeting between Ahmed and the BHEL management. The fast was called off and Maneka triumphantly announced that all their demands had been met. Piling into waiting vehicles, the RSM cavalcade immediately left for Lucknow where the good news was again repeated at a press conference. Though Congress(I) leaders immediately dismissed the affair as an attempt to gain cheap popularity, they could not deny that Maneka had won another round, and right in brother-in-law Rajiv Gandhi's electoral backyard.

—S. PREMI

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- Investment cost of new cement plants 3 to 4 times higher; therefore they require extra realisation to be viable. Suggest lesser levy quota and excise duty relief.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to the 45th Annual General Meeting of your Company. The Directors' Report and the Audited Accounts of the Company for the year 1983 have been in your hands for some time now. It would be gratifying to note that the sales and other income of your Company increased by over 31% to Rs. 87.84 crores in 1983 from Rs. 66.92 crores in 1982. The profits before interest and depreciation were also higher at Rs. 12.98 crores during 1983 representing an increase of over 27% over 1982. But for the inhibiting factors which hampered production at the Company's Paper Mills and Cement Plant, your Company's working results for the year would have been still better. The saga of growth, however, continues uninterrupted : in 1973, our sales and other income were Rs. 12 crores; five years later, they were Rs. 34 crores and five years thereafter in 1983 they reached Rs. 88 crores.

During the year under review, the Paper & Board Division achieved 92.7% capacity utilisation. A scheme of modernisation and renovation of Paper Mills in Orissa at an estimated cost of Rs. 25 crores has been taken up. The year under review was a year of consolidation for Lakshmi Cement. Cement production was 2,88,954 tonnes, despite heavy power cuts and the teething troubles. With 100% captive power generation capacity that has been installed, we now look forward to much higher production during the year 1984. Plans are also afoot to double the capacity of the Cement Plant from 5 lakh tonnes to 10 lakh tonnes per annum. It is a matter of satisfaction that the quality of cement produced by the Company has earned for itself a high reputation.

The Company's thrust towards modern Technology and Research & Development continues. I am happy to report that considerable improvements have been achieved in the field of energy conservation and water management. In the field of Research & Development, emphasis this year, has been on improving the yield of raw materials and effluent treatment. The Company has also successfully developed and installed a boiler for utilisation of bamboo dust, which hitherto has been a waste. In these endeavours we have been greatly assisted by the Pulp and Paper Research Institute, Jaykaypur in the establishment of which your Company has played a significant role.

It is gratifying that the Paper and Board Mills received recognition for capacity utilisation, energy conservation and safety from the Indian Paper Makers Association and Lakshmi Cement for best planning and upkeeping of limestone mines from the Government of Rajasthan.

Polyester Fibre Plant in Orissa

Spurred by the growth impulse and in a quest for new fields, your Company jointly with Industrial Promotion & Investment Corporation of Orissa Limited is promoting a project under a newly formed joint sector company "Orissa Synthetics Limited", to manufacture 15,000 tonnes per annum of polyester staple fibre. The project which is located in Dhenkanal, a backward district of Orissa, involves a total capital outlay of Rs. 73 crores. The world famous 'Du Pont' technology has been contracted for the project from Chemtex of USA. It is a happy augury that Sri Rajiv Gandhi, M.P. had graciously laid the foundation stone of the project on 19th January, 1984. The Union Minister of Finance, Sri Pranab Mukherjee, the Chief Minister of Orissa, Sri J.B. Patnaik and the Union Minister of State for Defence, Sri K. P. Singh Deo had all lent their distinguished presence on the occasion. The project is expected to go on stream during 1986.

An overview of the National Economic Scene

The economy in 1983-84 showed signs of recovery after passing through a depressing phase for the last 2-3 years. Blessed by record food grains output of nearly 150 million tonnes and very significant improvements in other agricultural crops, the overall growth in GNP is expected to be about 6 to 7 per cent during the year 1983-84 as against 1.8% last year. This may facilitate achievement of the 6th Plan target of 5.2% growth per annum and consequently help in setting higher goals for the 7th Plan.

Unfortunately, the industrial growth has not kept pace with the Sixth plan target of 8% per annum. The basic reason for the non-fulfilment of the expectations; to my mind, has been the woefully low level of production and productivity. In a developing country like ours, the panacea is not only creation of additional capacity but also optimum utilisation of the available capacity which in the industrial sector is as low as 75%. Though the Central Government has announced several measures to encourage higher capacity utilisation, the expected results could not be achieved primarily due to substantial failures in the infrastructural and allied fields.

Notwithstanding bumper harvest, recessionary conditions are still present in many industries. Some Government policies have also proved unhelpful. Cutback in outlays by Government and Public Sector undertakings has taken its toll. There is need to stimulate demand. Reduction of excise duty in certain industries in order to encourage demand is a welcome feature of the recent Government policy. I suggest such policy should be further extended to other industries also, who are experiencing demand recession. This will in turn result in more production, which will ultimately bring in more revenue to the exchequer.

Basically the industrial depression is linked to causes like high production costs, heavy incidence of excise duties, low productivity and technological obsolescence. The productivity gap instead of narrowing down is widening. For instance, according to a study, the labour productivity gap between India and Japan widened from 1 : 2.8 in 1960 to 1 : 7 in 1977. This blunts our competitive edge. When the country is in the throes of the second industrial revolution, there is need to address ourselves to the task of achieving higher productivity and improving technology. The Government has adopted a more liberal approach towards import of technology but a greater thrust is required in this direction.

It is a matter of concern that ours is becoming a high cost economy. Capital output ratio has been rising. It is essential that this problem is tackled squarely and urgently. Determining the appropriate unit size of production to garner the advantage of economies of scale is of prime importance because the unit size in India is very low by any reckoning which increases both investment and production cost as well as does not enable it to take advantage of the latest technological advances. What I consider to be the core problem today is how to make the industry cost effective and to plan industrial growth on that basis.

While one must commend the generally positive outlook adopted by the Government in formulating its industrial policies, it is unfortunate that measures like the recent MRTP Act amendments and new Guidelines for Nominee-Directors have had a dampening effect on investment climate and confidence.

PAPER INDUSTRY

While the installed capacity of the Paper Industry has been gradually growing, the capacity utilisation has been coming down. In the calendar year 1983, the overall capacity utilisation has been 58.5% as compared to 68% in 1982 and 74.6% in 1981. Although the industry has in the past achieved capacity utilisation of 89%, even if we consider a figure of 85%, the country could have produced an additional 5 lakh tonnes of paper of a value of about Rs. 450 crores. There are a number of reasons for low capacity utilisation, the main factors being: (i) Failure of infrastructure (ii) Industrial relations (iii) Unremunerative operations (iv) Obsolescence of machinery. I would like to touch upon these factors briefly.

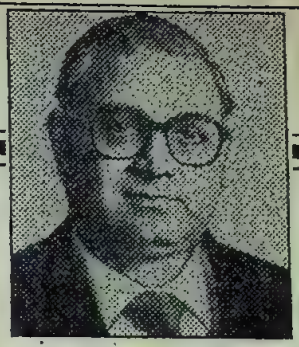
Failure of Infrastructure

It is unfortunate that despite assurances, performance of power, coal and railway sectors were far from satisfactory and have been responsible for considerable amount of loss of production and escalation in costs. Power cuts, frequent interruptions in power supply and high

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CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

At the 45th Annual General Meeting held on 27th June, 1984.



SHRI HARI SHANKAR SINGHANIA

fluctuations in voltage result in considerable loss of production, specially in continuous process plants, besides damaging the plant and machinery. Moreover, cost of power is an ever escalating phenomenon. In the States of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh in which the Company has its Paper and Board plants, increase in power rates has been more than 100 per cent in a period of just four years. Besides, inadequate supply of coal and sharp deterioration in its quality have seriously affected production. There has also been very heavy escalation in the price of coal which has doubled in a period of four years.

Industrial Relations

In the year 1983, some of the large paper units have faced considerable loss of man-hours due to strikes and lock outs. The tendency to ignore existing agreements and laws (like in the case of Payment of Bonus Act) and to ask for abnormally high increase in wages and perquisites, is growing. Inter-union rivalry continues to be a major deterrent in this area. There is apathy towards productivity. I can only sincerely hope that there will be an appreciation of the need to settle disputes without loss of production and to increase productivity, particularly in the context of the high capital output ratio in the country.

Unremunerative Operations

In the year 1983, conditions in the paper industry were difficult. The rise in cost of production due to reasons beyond the industry's control reduced the profit margin further. Besides cost increases due to power, coal and freight, royalties on bamboo and wood, which are basic raw materials for the industry, are being continuously escalated. There is also a tendency on the part of the State Governments to sell these raw materials at auction prices, rather than making them available at reasonable cost as industrial raw materials. Such policies are short-sighted. The controlled price of white printing paper continues to be pegged at a level below cost of production in spite of the recent increase in its price by Rs. 1,000 per tonne from 11th May, 1984.

On account of these factors, there has been considerable erosion in the profitability. As is known, the profitability of the Paper Industry has been poor for the last few years and this erosion, therefore, resulted in the operations of many units becoming unviable leading to closures.

Obsolescence of Machinery : Urgent need for Modernisation

Considerable capacity in the Paper Industry is old and requires immediate modernisation. Modernisation is a must because without it the production is bound to suffer and costs will escalate. Unfortunately, the pace of modernisation has been slow because of high capital costs. On the basis of present prices of machinery and equipment, modernisation in large paper mills will cost anything between Rs. 9,000 to Rs. 10,000 per annual tonne. The present price of paper is around Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 9,000 per tonne which is unable to bear the high incidence of interest and depreciation of such modernisation, which will be of the order of Rs. 2,500 per tonne. It is, therefore, essential that modernisation is accorded same priority as new investment, if not more. A package of measures must be formulated and adopted on an urgent footing to tackle the need.

Capacity Increase by Expansion

In India, the per capita consumption of paper and paperboards is still very low and is around 1.8 Kgs. The Development Council for Paper, Pulp & Allied Industries has projected a per capita consumption of 3.3 Kgs. by 2000 A.D. and to achieve it, the installed capacity would have to be increased by about 20 lakh tonnes or nearly doubling the existing capacity. This will require huge investment. A considerable portion of this new capacity can be created by expansion of the existing plants because in case of expansions, the investment will be considerably lower and can be implemented more expeditiously. The Government has, at present, accorded certain excise duty benefits to new units, which will come into production by March, 1987. I suggest similar suitable benefits should be accorded to expansions also, because the problem of high capital costs affects them too.

The forest based industries in general and paper industry in particular, are up against an ever-increasing raw material shortage. Our sources of raw materials are depleting at a rate faster than the one at which they are being redeveloped. The need of the hour is to make all out efforts to regenerate forest wealth by a well-planned plantation programme.

CEMENT INDUSTRY

Cement Industry is another example in which the capacity utilisation during the last 5 to 6 years has gone down from 90% to 76% generally because of the reasons enumerated earlier. Additional production on the basis of 85% capacity utilisation would have been about 3 million tonnes of a value of Rs. 250 crores. Further there would have been no necessity of any import of cement thus saving valuable foreign exchange.

The installed capacity of the industry has increased to 36 million tonnes from 24 million tonnes in 1979-80 and is expected to touch 43 million tonnes early next year which will be equivalent to the Sixth Plan target. This has been possible only due to the pragmatic policy adopted by the Government to ensure reasonable return to the industry. Per capita consumption in India is hardly 1/12th of the developed countries. Therefore, the country has still to go a long way to create substantial additional cement capacity for which massive investment is required.

Urgent need for Price Increase

Unfortunately, the Cement Industry is again at the cross-roads. The cost escalation due to increased cost of inputs like power, coal, railway freight, wages, etc. all beyond the control of the industry, has not been compensated by increase in levy cement prices since February 1982, although it was expected to be revised by the Government six monthly. On the other hand, non-levy prices have fallen sharply. This has squeezed the profit margin in the cement industry. As far as new plants are concerned, their operations have become uneconomic because they have to bear a very high incidence, interest and depreciation in view of high capital investment cost.

New Cement Plants require extra Realisation

The investment cost of new cement plants which came into production from 1982 onwards is in the range of Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 per annual tonne of capacity. The new plants which are in the pipe line or being planned now are estimated to cost between Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 1,300 per annual tonne of capacity which means that the cost of installation of new plants is 3 to 4 times higher than the cost prevailing nearly 8 years ago. Thus the new plants to be economically viable require extra realisation to meet the incidence of higher interest and depreciation and to provide for the intended 12% post tax return.

This fact was fully recognised by the Government and accordingly the change was brought about in the cement pricing policy allowing higher retention price for the new cement plants. After partial decontrol policy it is necessary that this matter is not lost sight of and suitable adjustments are made in the policy by reducing levy cement quota as well as by providing adequate excise duty rebate to such new cement plants in order to compensate them for the extra financial burden. The Government has provided excise duty relief for such new investments to tackle similar situations in other capital intensive industries. I urge the Government to promptly take corrective measures in this direction so that the new cement plants which have been set up at considerable cost remain viable and continue to serve the national needs. Furthermore it is necessary not to shy off fresh capital from this core industry which is bound to happen if investments become non-viable.

Cement Plants in most of the States are suffering from power shortages, frequent interruptions and voltage fluctuations. The power situation in Rajasthan is most severe and power cuts are practically throughout the year and even go upto 100% for several weeks. In order to maintain cement production the Company has to install captive DG sets to meet 100% power requirement at a huge cost of Rs. 6 crores. The cost of diesel generation of power is about three times that of the grid power. To encourage installation of captive DG sets, the Government had announced its intention to compensate part of the additional cost so incurred but unfortunately, the formula adopted provides almost no relief in practice. In the context of extreme power shortage in the country and Rajasthan in particular where your Company is augmenting its own power supply in order to maintain cement production, it is only fair that Government does provide full relief in respect of this extra diesel generation cost.

Before I conclude, I would like to say a few words about the human resource, which you all know, is so vital for the growth and development of any organisation. Your Company is fortunate to have an excellent management team. It is only through their dedication, hard work and team spirit that implementation of schemes in record time and maintenance of production and productivity at the optimum levels have been possible. On behalf of the Board of Directors, as well as on my own behalf, I would like to express my sincere appreciation of the contribution made by the workers, staff, officers and the management team of different divisions, for the smooth functioning of the Company. My thanks are also due to the Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan and to the financial institutions and banks, for their active support and co-operation in our activities.

Thank you.

Note : This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.



AFGHANISTAN

The Double Shuffle

LITTLE seems to have changed in Afghanistan since the Soviet occupation in December 1979. Except that the long-term strategy adopted by the Kremlin seems to be paying off. Last month, Bombay-born journalist PATRICIA J. SETHI *returned from a 10-day tour of the country, which included a lengthy meeting with President Babrak Karmal, with a first-hand account of the current situation and an insight into what the Soviet's future plans are. Her report:*



KABUL is a city on guard. The runways of its international airport groan under the weight of Sukhoi bomber squadrons, as well as MiG-17s and MiG-21s bearing Afghan and Soviet insignias. At regular intervals, MI-8 and MI-4 Hind helicopters gunships flutter off on reconnaissance sorties to buzz the hills around Kabul even as squat-bellied Antonov transport planes dock down to disgorge troops and supplies. T-52 tanks flank the airport perimeter, with their guns constantly trained into the hills.

Along the city's broad poplar-lined avenues, convoys of armoured personnel carriers, military jeeps and trucks—and even the occasional tank—rumble off to the Afghan army barracks at Bala Hissar fort, or onto highways linking Kabul with Afghanistan's other cities. All government buildings, and now even schools and hotels, have teams of Sarandoi (security police) armed with pistols and Kalishnikovs on constant patrol outside the entrance gates. Anyone who enters has to produce identification papers or he is subject to a thorough search. At night, as curfew sets in at 10 p.m., tanks and armoured personnel carriers clank through the streets to set up positions at important office buildings and to man all intersections till 4 a.m. when the curfew ends. Army troops with AK-47s drawn to shoot-on-sight halt any vehicle or person who has dared to intrude on the curfew period.

If the electricity fails, four high-beam searchlights, positioned on top of four hills which dissect and surround Kabul, criss-cross the city all through the curfew hours at regular one-minute intervals. Flares set on the city's outer walls light up the cool star-studded spring nights, following a regularised pattern: green flares signalling that all patrols are moving normally; orange flares suggesting that something suspicious is going on; red flares indicating impending danger which immediately lets loose a barrage of helicopter-gunships to direct ground forces in the problem area; white flares signalling the all-clear.

During a 10-day stay in Kabul, however, the electricity stayed on all night (diplomats say that the last serious power disruption occurred many months ago) and it was very quiet except for one night when gunfire resounded in the hills. The battle waged for two hours: according to the bazaar gossip and diplomats, the Mujahedeen fired several surface-to-air missiles (SAM) into the general vicinity of the airport. The response was vigorous: artillery guns, bombers, helicopters pounding the area from whence the rockets came. Diplomats contend that the rockets did not do much damage and the exaggerated response is a natural reaction by troops who are fighting an enemy they cannot see or engage in a regular battle.

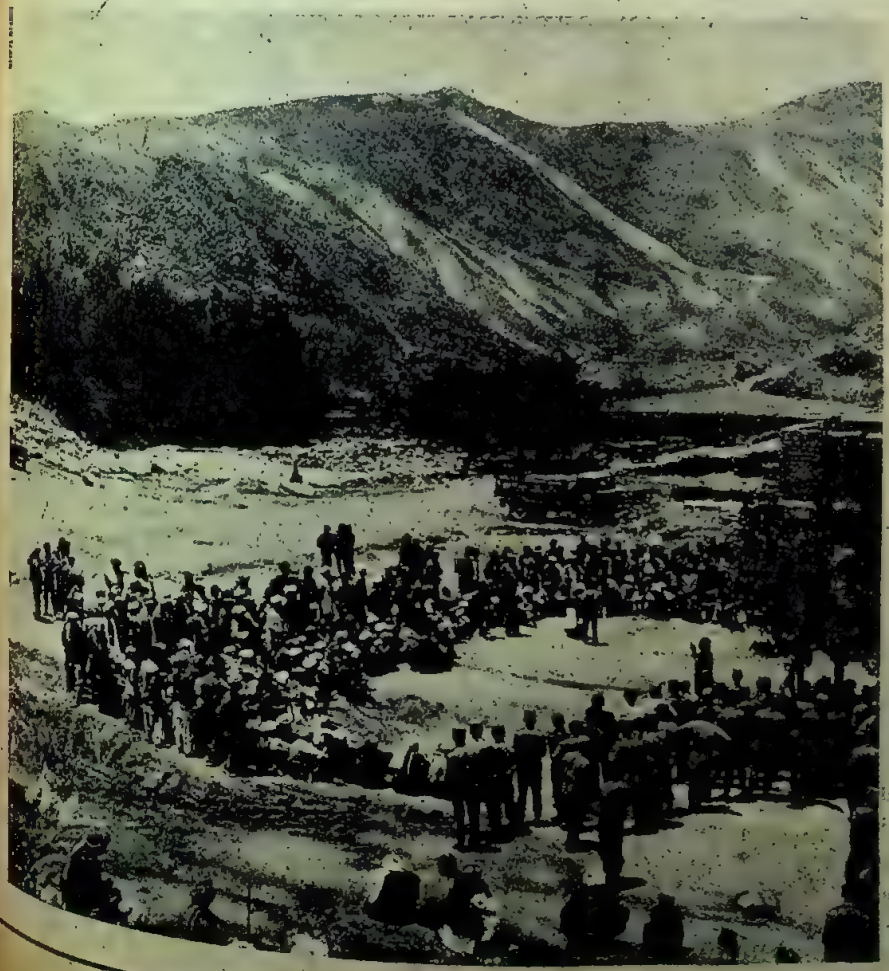
Many diplomats also admit that the number of sustained or major rebel attacks in and around Kabul have fallen sharply since 1982. This is attributed to

better and much more sophisticated security operations, a government policy of pay-offs and unconditional pardons which has attempted to neutralise the opposition within the country, and a growing sense of anger among the populace at the violence which has taken innocent civilian lives (as a result of heavy security at government buildings, the Mujahedeen have been targeting civilian centres. In the past three months in Kabul, the Mujahedeen claimed responsibility for the April bombings of three schools because of traditional Islamic objection to educating women; the March 21 bombing of a mosque run by pro-government mullahs which left seven dead and 24 injured; the May bombing of a cinema theatre which killed four and injured 14).

The military alert that has Kabul in its grip should not in any way suggest that there is a sense of panic there or that a siege mentality prevails among the population. On the contrary, except for the curfew period, it is life as usual in the city. The mullahs call the faithful to prayer five times a day, strains of Allaho Akbar rending the air. The bazaars teem with turbaned, bearded merchants haggling over deals and sealing bargains over cups of chai and strips of nan; the more modern element sorting out business over Coca-Cola and Sprite, bottled in Afghanistan. Kabul is the central market — "the main depot or clearing-house" as one diplomat puts it — for goods travelling from Japan and China to the Gulf states, and between Western Europe and India (Afghan duties and taxes are minimal, if any). Any currency is accepted in transactions: the pound, the dollar, the rouble, even the Indian rupee. Thus you will find stores full of goods from all over the world: Chinese pottery and silks; Russian chocolate and refrigerators; American jeans and cigarettes; Japanese televisions and video-recorders; Iranian pistachio-nuts and rugs; French cologne and after-shaves. Toyotas vie for the alley ways with Mercedes-Benzes, Chevrolets and Beiras.

Army vehicles are constantly scurrying about, the Sarandio is ever vigilant, but the masses go about their daily routine in the calm, relaxed fashion endemic to the subcontinent. Army convoys appear to bother no one; in fact graciously give the right of way to private cars and taxis trying to overtake them. One night army troops guarding the intersection of Ansary Watt and Peace Avenue during the curfew had a particularly raucous singing session complete with handclapping and wolf-whistles until the manager of the nearby hotel advised them "to cool it" so that his guests could get some sleep.

Karmal has established party cadres at all levels of social and political life which preach the virtues of the revolution.



WHEN the Russians first moved into Afghanistan in December 1979 it was a specific response to what they viewed as three serious threats:

- The strategic threat as spelt out by the US policy of "containment and encirclement" of the Soviet Union by countries friendly to the US;
- The upsurge of a theocratic Islamic fundamentalism with Khomeini's victory in Iran which could trigger off sympathetic vibrations in the Soviet Union's Central Asian Republics;
- Former Afghan President Hafizullah Amin's overtures to the US (he had seven meetings with US diplomats based in Kabul between September and November 1979) which could alter the political balance in Afghanistan from that of a buffer nation for the Soviet Union to that of a US ally. "The Russians had to react and they reacted," says one high-ranking diplomat stationed in Kabul. "What they planned was a quick strike, the restoration of the original political balance with a government friendly to them in command, and a hasty exit with perhaps a token force left behind. But that plan fell victim to a terrain which has made it historically difficult for any government in Kabul to control the countryside and an insurgency encouraged by western aid." Now, this diplomatic source continues, the Russians are locked into a situation where they must stay on until the following conditions are met: neutralise the insurgency; stabilise the regime of President Babrak Karmal; establish direct relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Iran which will secure boundaries thereby eliminating support for rebel elements.

There is a general consensus among diplomatic sources in Kabul that the Russians are committed to stay — and they plan to stay on indefinitely. To this end they have unleashed 110,000 troops in Afghanistan (with another 40,000 ready to move in at a moment's notice from bases in the Soviet Union near the Afghan border); there are 4,000 Soviet advisers at every level of the Kabul Go-

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vernment advising on economic, security and political matters. The Soviet tab is estimated by solid sources on the subcontinent to be some US $1.5 million a day. So far, according to non-aligned diplomats in Kabul, the cost of the occupation policy is not hurting the Soviet Union a great deal. The death toll for the four-year occupation period is about 4,000 Russian soldiers; the injured some 12,000. "They've reasoned in the Kremlin that the $1.5 million a day price-tag is well worth their national security interests and they've concluded that international opinion against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan is not worth worrying about," says one diplomatic source. "And since the Soviet Union is a closed society the Government does not have to concern itself too much with domestic public opinion."

Despite government propaganda through the mass media which extolls "the Great Soviet-Afghan Friendship" and "the kindness of the people of the Soviet Union to their brothers in Afghanistan", the Russians have no illusions about their popularity. They are obviously respected and treated well by party cadres and government officials, but many mullahs and merchants resent their presence because they fear that "a socialist revolution threatens our power and property". As a result, Russian troops maintain a low profile, confined to their barracks for the most part — venturing out only to help monitor the curfew hours. They are taken out on Saturdays under escort to the bazaars to do their shopping. There are occasional incidents of looting, rape or drunkenness by Soviet troops but according to diplomatic sources they are fairly well-behaved. When questioned about the Soviet presence in Kabul, one Soviet official pointed out that "time changes everything. In another 10 or 20 years, the new generation of Afghans will view our presence differently". And he noted that only a generation ago, the peoples of the Central Asian Republics resented the white Russian of the north. "Things have changed a great deal since those days," he added.

Given the Kremlin's decision to hang tough in Afghanistan, diplomats in Kabul contend that the rebels based in Pakistan have a difficult task ahead. For one thing, they are no match for a superpower which is prepared to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely, and to throw in as many troops and weapons as are needed for the job. Besides, adds one informed analyst, the rebel leadership is wracked by divisions and factions: "Not one of them is a Ho Chi Minh." Non-Afghan intelligence sources tell of the luxurious life-styles of rebel leaders in Peshawar. Some of them are said to control 50 per cent of the truck traffic trade between Karachi and Peshawar. And a few recently paid US $10,000 apiece to marry 16-year-old girls as fourth wives. Moreover, some of the rebels fight as mercenaries, switching sides if the offer is better. Given these factors and the improved security apparatus in most of Afghanistan's major cities, diplomats assess that the Mujahedeen "will continue to be a nuisance factor" in the Afghan political equation, but how serious a nuisance factor will depend on how well they can organise and how sophisticated their weapons. Right now they are getting close to $25 million a month from the West plus another $10 million from the Arabs. Their antiquated weapons have now given way to Redeye anti-aircraft SAM missiles, RPG rockets, anti-tank wire-guided missiles and sophisticated walkietalkies which can connect various patrols within a 10-kilometre range. But despite the qualitative and quantitative increase in aid to the rebels, diplomats in Kabul maintain that as of today the Soviet superpower definitely has the edge.



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Defence analysts insist that the Panjshir strategy marks the beginning of qualitatively different tactics by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

In the opinion of several analysts, the only rebel leader who might have posed a threat to Karmal over the long range was Ahmad Shah Massoud, the 28-year-old head of a band of some 7,000 guerrillas based in the 70-mile-long Panjshir valley, north-east of Kabul. The Soviets had bought a truce with him last year after their sixth siege of the Panjshir failed. Massoud's price was high: $350,000, but the Soviets reckoned it was worth a long-term negotiated settlement with him. Besides, unlike the rebel leaders in Pakistan, Massoud was a genuine and committed nationalist who chose to remain in Afghanistan to fight. He used the truce money to build up his base and to buy more arms. By November last year, however, the Soviets were seriously worried that Massoud was getting too big for his Afghani pantaloons. He was granting interviews to foreign journalists depicting himself as the Tito of Afghanistan, the Lion of the Panjshir. The Soviets began to brace themselves for alternatives which would rule out all further deals with Massoud. When the truce came to an end in February, civilians in the valley were advised to move to Kabul while new negotiations took place. Massoud made three demands this time: double the original price-tag, deal directly with the Russians (he refused to deal with Karmal) and autonomous jurisdiction over the Panjshir. The Russians acquiesced willingly to the first two demands; they told him they would have to consider the third. Since they had no intention of agreeing to the autonomy clause, they stalled Massoud even as they put their seventh push into the Panjshir into effect, a thrust aimed at wiping out Massoud. Massoud in turn tried to prove that he was a power to be reckoned with at the bargaining table; his followers destroyed two bridges on the Salang highway in early April: one near Dusi and the other on the Gorbund river north of Kabul.

Unlike in the previous sieges, the Russians did not include the Afghan army in the seventh thrust for fear of a possible leak to Massoud. Only top Afghan officials were briefed about a general plan; the specifics were totally in Russian hands. In the second week of

April, Russian commandos were air-dropped from mountain height into the Panjshir's side valleys to seal off all exit routes from the main valley. Shortly thereafter, some 20,000 Soviet troops, mobilised at Roha in the south and Faizabad in the north, pushed in from both ends to seal off the main valley. Even as this occurred, the truce negotiations continued under the white flag. On the morning of April 18, the Russian negotiating group flew up a helicopter to Massoud's base camp near Roha in the Panjshir to inform him that the Soviets could not accept his autonomy clause. They offered him a top-level position in the Government. He refused. The truce fell apart. Minutes after the helicopter carrying the Soviet negotiating team left the scene (no more than 15 minutes had elapsed) when bombers and MiG-jets from bases at Kabul, Bagram and Doshambe (near Stalinabad in the Soviet Union) carpet-bombed the valley. Any Mujahedeen assistance from Pakistan through the side valleys was wiped out by the Soviet commandos who had been air-dropped the week before. From April 18 to April 24 the main operations were carried out by air; ground and infantry forces moved in slowly starting April 21. Major Afghan units handled the mopping-up operations; Karmal's Government announced the "successful" mission on April 24.

THE RUSSIANS took 2,000 casualties during the seventh siege of the Panjshir: the heaviest toll came during the commando drops; later mines dug in throughout the valley floor inflicted many injuries. But defense analysts insist that the Panjshir strategy marks the beginning of qualitatively different tactics by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. "They are going to depend much more on their superior air power to attack rebel strongholds, thus reducing the number of Soviet casualties," says one military expert. "And they are going to concentrate on cutting off rebel groups from their supply routes to Pakistan." The message that Massoud ostensibly sent on May 9 to Peshawar asking for boots, clothes and arms suggests to some observers that the last tactic is already working.

Internally, Karmal has embarked on a two-part policy with Soviet guidance and assistance which will set in motion "a national democratic revolution which is anti-feudal and anti-imperialist with a socialist orientation," to use the President's own words. He intends to turn Afghanistan into a modern progressive society by building up a machinery loyal to the revolution and in turn loyal to Karmal and the Soviet Union, at the same time assuring Islamic elements within Afghan society that the revolution does not run counter to Islam. Throughout the country, Karmal's People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) has established party cadres at all levels of social and political life—cadres which preach the virtues of the revolution. Eleven Young Pioneer Palaces have been set up with assistance from the GDR and the Soviet Union "to imbue 80,000 young Afghans with the spirit of the revolution," in the words of Simoy Yusufi, director of Kabul's Young Pioneer Palace. Every year 5,000 youngsters go to training camps for young pioneers in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries. The PDPA has established a youth organization headed by Dr Salu Marjan which has attracted 125,000 children around the country to work for the glory of the revolution. "The purpose of the youth movement is to instill in our youth patriotism, internationalism, a sense of sacrifice and enthusiasm for the revolution," says Marjan. The Russians have also built factories, schools, hospitals and a polytechnic modelled on Soviet patterns—all of which are expected to change the face of feudal Afghanistan. The Russians also train the Afghan army and have reorganised the defence system on Soviet lines.

Keeping in mind that a great leap forward to a socialist revolution could boomerang in an Islamic country, Karmal has moved very slowly with the traditional aspects of Islamic society unlike his predecessor Amin. For example, even though the ideology of the PDPA is decidedly leftist, there is no mention at all of communism or of Marxist-Leninism. To make his PDPA and his revolution more palatable to Islamic elements in Afghan society, Karmal has conceived a broad-based National Fatherland Front which is composed of various groups of Afghan society. He held a Jirga (national assembly) last year to permit all political groups to give vent to their opinions and make suggestions about the revolution. He has released 80 per cent of those who had been imprisoned by his predecessor Amin, and even western diplomats admit that his regime is much more humane when compared with the butchery that characterised Amin's leadership. Karmal has set up an Islamic Affairs Commission to ensure that Islamic practices and beliefs continue: mosques are being rebuilt, Karmal is seen attending services at mosques, the holy days are observed, the

Five girls, carrying rifles and claiming to be members of the civilian brigade spoke fervently and passionately about their revolution and what it meant for young women in Afghanistan.



SHER SHAH



He intends to turn Afghanistan into a modern, progressive society by building up a machinery loyal to the revolution and in turn loyal to Karmal and the Soviet Union.

tithes and property of the mullahs remain untouched. "The purpose of our national democratic revolution is not to get rid of religion but to incorporate religion and the characteristics of our society into the revolution," says President Karmal. "Revolutionary government should be at the service of its people. What the people want, we want. Islamic beliefs and traditions are part of Afghan society and we respect them."

Karmal has reverted to the original Islamic colours (red, black and green) in the Afghan flag (Amin had switched to red) and he has changed Amin's compulsory education programme to an "optional literacy programme for women". Property rights are scrupulously observed; in fact, merchants and businessmen are encouraged with loans, credits and tax exemptions. Some Third World diplomats in Kabul insist that despite Karmal's image as a Soviet puppet in the West, he has moved slowly, constructively and moderately — walking the fine line between Islam and revolution — so that for the first time in the history of Afghanistan "there is at least a semblance of organised government in the country."

Thus Kabul is a curious mix of revolution and Islam. Chadri-clad women walk side-by-side with young women in short skirts or jeans. In the village of Bagrami outside of Kabul, a chadri-clad woman at the water tap rushed off when I tried to talk to her. But five 15-year-old girls, carrying rifles and claiming to be members of "the civilian brigade to defend the revolution", talked to me at length. They spoke fervently and passionately about their revolution and what it meant for young women in Afghanistan: it meant "an education, freedom from the veil, freedom from feudalists who want to keep us down," said Khalida. "We do not want to become the fourth wife of a 60-year-old man, existing solely for his whim and pleasure."

Karmal is also eager to reach a negotiated settlement with his neighbours which will establish him unequivocally as Afghanistan's leader and bring about the peaceful conditions necessary for him to build his national democratic revolution in Afghanistan. Thus far, however, the four-year-old experiment in shuttle diplomacy by UN mediator Diego Cordovez has reached a stalemate. Last year, Cordovez came as close to a breakthrough as possible. Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yakub Khan appeared willing to settle for an agreement which reaffirmed the territorial integrity of the two nations thus tacitly accepting the Durand line as the legitimate boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan and putting an end to the Pushtun question which has plagued relations between the two countries throughout history — in exchange for a signed Afghan assurance that the Soviets would be asked to withdraw their troops in stages. No timetable was to be written into the agreement, just the formal acceptance of a Soviet withdrawal. It was also agreed in principle that all refugees could return to Afghanistan.

But when Yakub Khan went to Washington, US Secretary of State George Shultz and National Security Chief William Clark insisted that the specific timetable for a phased withdrawal of Soviet troops (beginning two months from the day the agreement was signed and to be completed in eight months) be written into the document. Yakub Khan returned to Geneva with the new demand and the talks fell through. Not much has happened since on the mediation front. Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko pointedly snubbed Zia-ul-Haq when the latter attended Yuri Andropov's funeral in Moscow this year. And in his May Day message, Karmal resurrected the Pushtun question (after a long period of silence) when he affirmed "the solidarity of the Afghan peoples with their Pushtun and Baluch brethren".

During a three-hour-conversation with Karmal, he insisted that he strongly supports a negotiated settlement and that he wants direct talks with Pakistan tomorrow. But as he sees it, "the Government of Zia-ul-Haq will not negotiate directly because its ears are being tweaked by the United States". Karmal refuses to talk with rebel leaders in Pakistan because they are "bandits" and he contends that Russian withdrawal is a bilateral issue to be resolved by the two governments involved. "The Soviets came at our request and they will leave at our request," he says. Karmal continues to hope for a peaceful resolution of the Afghan question. "We are optimists and we are a patient people," he says. "Sooner or later the issue will be resolved. We know that the people of Pakistan want peace with their brothers in Afghanistan. Either the military junta of Zia will finally come to terms with reality or the people of Pakistan will move to remove the obstacles. Zia is sitting on a powder keg. Governments come and go; the will of the people remains."



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SRI LANKA

The Elusive Solution



WHEN Prime Minister Indira Gandhi telephonically invited Sri Lanka President Junius Richard Jayewardene to visit her on his way back from Washington and London, the idea was to give another gentle nudge to the talks between the two governments towards solving the island's Tamil problem which have made little progress since they began seven months ago. Jayewardene arrived in New Delhi last fortnight, talked to the Indian prime minister and her colleagues and departed, leaving everyone guessing about his next move.

The second Jayewardene-Mrs Gandhi meeting in eight months did, however, underscore one important point: that there is no instant solution to Sri Lanka's vexed Tamil problem. The unhelpful attitude of Sirimao Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the most important opposition party in the island, the stiff stance of the powerful Buddhist clergy, the uncooperative posture of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and the hawks within the President's own ruling United National Party have brought the All-Party Conference (APC) almost to a grinding halt.

"Nobody is coming up with any fresh ideas," complains Lalith Athulathmudali, the minister for national security. "We need a lot of ideas from all groups to bridge the chasm between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Sometimes I think the only parties that are interested in a solution are the Governments of Sri Lanka and India."

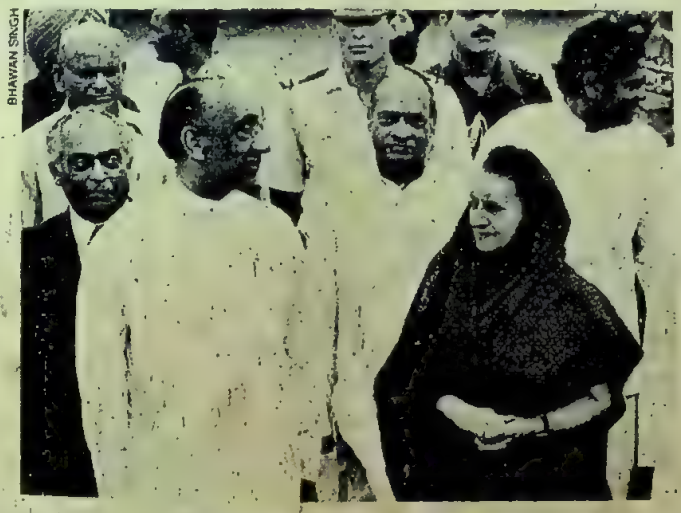
In Delhi, Jayewardene and Athulathmudali had lengthy talks with Indian leaders in which they reiterated their determination to find a political solution to the tangle. At the same time, they defended Colombo's decision to seek help from Mossad, the Israeli intelligence outfit, and from retired members of Britain's elite Special Air Services (SAS) saying that they needed an intelligence network to combat terrorism by Tamil extremists.

The SAS team moved in last September and the Mossad experts four months ago. Their activities, Athulathmudali insists, are confined to giving lectures to Sri Lanka's intelligence men to plug loopholes. They are not being used on the ground to tackle the Tamil Tigers.

While there has been no initiative, Colombo is making a new effort to find a solution to the ethnic problem. It has proposed to set up a second chamber of parliament. The idea is still at the conceptual stage. Jayewardene said, "The proposal is still in the womb. Wait till it comes out."

INDIA TODAY understands that:

► the upper house will be modelled on the Senate of the United States;



BHAWAN SINGH

Jayewardene with Mrs Gandhi

► each of the island's 25 districts will send two representatives to the senate, to be elected by the existing district development councils (DDC's);

► the DDC's may transfer some of their executive powers to the proposed senate;

► the Tamil-dominated northern province, comprising five districts, will send 10 members to the senate, while the northern province's three districts — predominantly populated by Tamil-speaking Muslims — will send six;

► the President may then appoint any of these members as ministers and one of them even as chief minister.

What is still to be worked out is: who are these senators going to be accountable to? To their region or to the Centre? To parliament or to the President? What kind of powers will they enjoy? How exactly will it fulfil the Tamil aspirations? Jayewardene wants to submit his ideas first to the APC, due to be reconvened shortly before giving it a final shape.

The TULF is understandably reluctant to react to the proposal. Said one of its spokesmen: "This has no parallel anywhere and we don't know what the President has in mind."

The basic idea of the scheme is to give executive power to the people of the area but routed through the Central Government and allay the Sinhalese fears that it is "a stepping stone to Eelam".

Meanwhile, with its mediatory initiatives being misinterpreted as influence, the Indian government appears to have decided to go slow on offers of help. The Tamils too appear to have realised the futility of waging their struggle away from their land. Beginning this fortnight, the TULF leaders have decided to return to their homes to launch a non-violent struggle in the next weeks. Preparing to leave for his native village near Jaffna, Appapillai Amrithalingam, the TULF secretary-general, said: "We want to keep violence out. We are left with no alternative but to fight peacefully for our rights." To begin with, the TULF has issued an appeal to the people in the northern and eastern provinces to observe July 25 as a day of mourning, in memory of those dead in the communal holocaust a year ago.

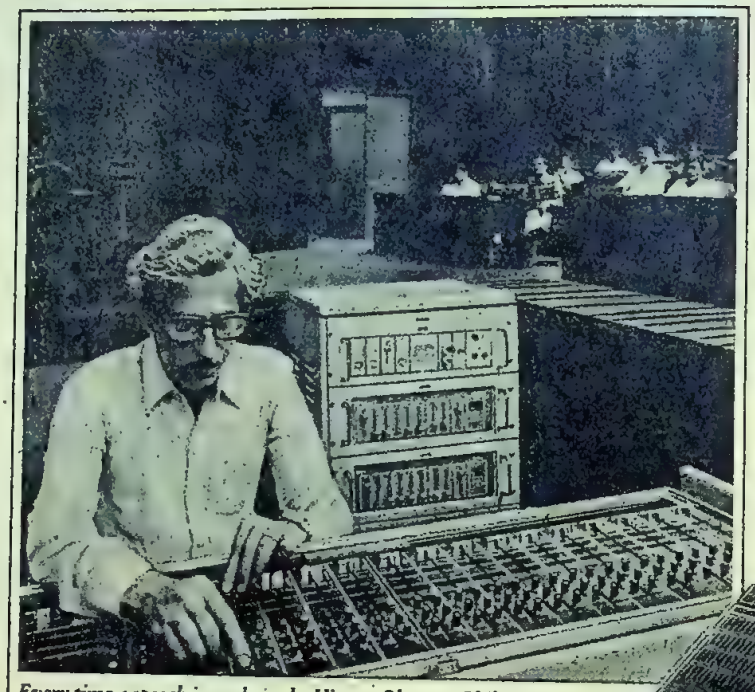
While waiting for the APC to resume its much-postponed plenary session, there is speculation whether or not the Tamil extremists will be invited. Said Athulathmudali: "If they give up violence, we will certainly consider involving them in the negotiations." There was no immediate reaction to the offer. Which way the negotiations will go depends on what the extremists propose to do.

A lot will depend on the hawks in the UNP too. Jayewardene did his best to soothe the ruffled feelings in India caused by the intemperate utterances of his prime minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. Many people in the island have not taken to Premadasa's tactless remarks about India and Mrs Gandhi either. As Bandaranaike remarked to a visiting Indian journalist: "Why is he saying such nasty things about Mrs Gandhi? Does he realise what Jayewardene has done by inviting foreign experts to contain terrorism? What if the CIA brings about a coup with the help of Mossad and the SAS? Who will Premadasa run to for help except Mrs Gandhi?"

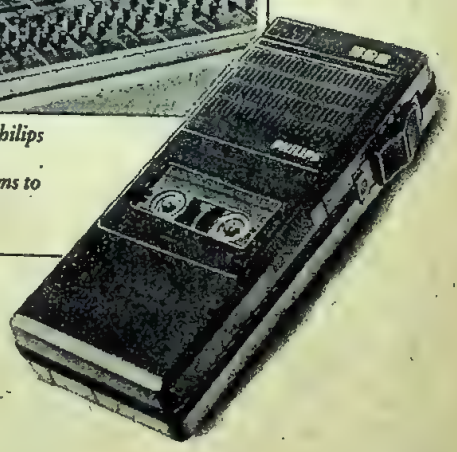
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INDO-BURMESE RELATIONS

Envoy's Success



RANGOON has an Indian ambassador who has re-enlivened India's relations with Burma. When George Gilbert Swell, 59, came to Rangoon as envoy of India more than two years ago, Indo-Burmese relations were not bad but dead, as a Burmese official said, laughing. Swell, who had been deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha for seven years before being inducted to diplomatic service, won Burmese hearts as well as their respect by a novel device. He made the Indian ambassador's residence in Rangoon on Tana Road the best appointed private lawn-cum-garden.

The Burmese, who love cleanliness above everything else and admire important people doing manual work, were highly impressed to see the picture postcard lawn of the Swell residence and the ambassador himself work on it every morning along with Burmese gardeners. Diplomats of the Burmese Foreign Office, which is located next door, were even more impressed. Soon the North Korean and Sri Lanka ambassadors who live close by came to see Swell for gardening advice and some of the western ambassadors followed suit.



Now Swell is talked about as the most popular ambassador in Rangoon, a compliment few Indian envoys in neighbouring countries have ever enjoyed. However, a bit of greenfing is not the only yardstick of Swell's diplomatic success in Burma, not even the fact that at 59 he has mastered the art of karate and last year climbed the highest peak in the Shan state to pay his own and India's respect to a venerable Buddhist monk who lives in a temple there. Perhaps the secret of his success lies primarily in the fact that unlike the typical north Indian foreign policy elite, Swell, who can easily be mistaken for a Burmese, understands the sensibilities of the Burmese ruling elite. He also has the additional advantage of being in the confidence of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Swell is talked about as the most popular ambassador in Rangoon, a compliment few Indian envoys in neighbouring countries have ever enjoyed. His success lies primarily in the fact that he understands the sensibilities of the Burmese ruling elite.

Swell realised soon after arriving in Rangoon that Burmese anti-Indianism is nothing but Burmese antipathy towards British imperialism with which Indian landlords, money-lender businessmen, policemen and soldiers had fully cooperated to keep Burma a part of India. Burmese historical memory, which is strong as a result of that country's long isolation from the rest of the world, and its single-minded inward-lookingness does not exactly draw the Burmese towards the Indian. At the same time he has a strong pull to India as the land of Buddha's birth and sermons. There are other reasons why Burma must maintain friendly relations with India. As one Burmese official put it: "We cannot ignore the fact that after China, our longest border is with India. Also, our border with India covers land and water while we have only a land frontier with China." Burma is therefore under geographical compulsion to maintain good relations with India as well as China, its two giant neighbours.

If Burma inclines towards China rather than India, the reason probably lies in the fact that China has been extending moral and material help to the White Flag Communist Party whose armed forces control the largest chunk of rebel-held territory in northern Burma. China has stopped aiding the White Flag communists but the fact that it can put geopolitical pressure on Rangoon probably compels Burma to keep Beijing in good humour. For the Burmese, the Chinese are "our kinsmen" —a term they will never use to describe Indians.

The lesson is not that India should put geopolitical pressure on Burma. Ambassador Swell tried other means and succeeded in at least partially tearing off the Burmese mask of indifference towards India. Largely through his effort, fully supported by Foreign Secretary Rasgotra, India is now the largest buyer of Burmese rice. Last year India bought 3.5 lakh tonnes of Burmese rice for hard currency paying Rs 2,200 per tonne on an average and agreed to continue to buy this amount yearly. This accounts for half of Burma's rice export which is essential for earning hard currency, and also enables India to export the finest quality Indian rice to the Arab countries. Add timber, precious stones and other commodities to rice and India is easily one of Burma's major trade partners.

India, however, cannot play a much larger role in Burma's development because Indian companies, public and private, just cannot compete wih companies from Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and Japan. The Burmese Government has been implementing an integrated plan to build rice silos and rice mills, and has also an ambitious plan to modernise and expand its metre gauge railway. In all three fields, India has the industrial capacity and technological competence to offer Burma the best of collaboration. And yet when Burma called for global tenders for the construction of 82 rice mills and 20 warehouses, India lost to a Thailand-based Thai-German company. This company is now working on the projects for which the Burmese Government has allotted $8.2 million (Rs 9 crore) this year. India's chance of bagging the railroad contract is not particularly bright because South Korea is a keen competitor. In fact if the Indian Government does not subsidise companies coming forward to take part in Burma's development, Rangoon will find it difficult to make use of the Rs 10 crore credit that India has offered it recently.

The Burmese are very pleased with the recently concluded maritime boundary agreement with India and they freely admit that the terms have been favourable to them. An immediate result was the recent official visit to New Delhi of the Burmese Foreign Minister Uchit Hlaing, returning the Indian foreign minister's visit of 1982. However, the Burmese do not hide their feeling that a real political breakthrough in Indo-Burma relations awaits a long overdue visit to Rangoon by Mrs Gandhi herself. General Ne Win who, as chief of the Burma Socialist Party, still controls and runs the entire state, visited Delhi in

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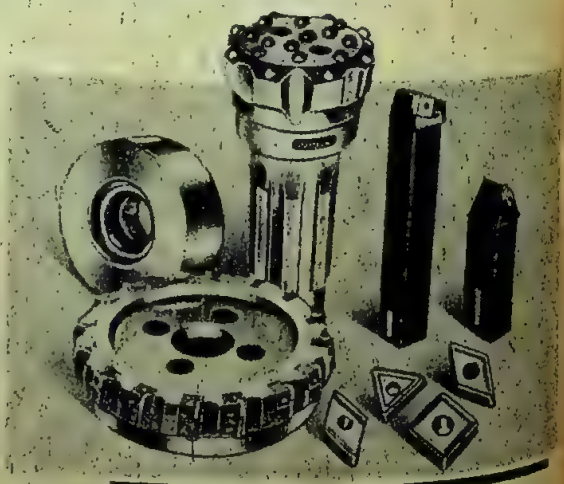


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1980 just before his retirement as president of Burma.

As party chairman, the general has not seen any visiting foreign dignitory in the last four years. But in Burma, the party rather than the Government is supreme. The present President U San Yu is fourth in the political hierarchy, and the Prime Minister U Maung Kha much below. However, INDIA TODAY was told by Burmese officials confidently that if Mrs Gandhi came to Rangoon, General Ne Win would almost certainly call on her. There are many ancient manuscripts in Indian temples pertaining to Burma's heroic struggle against the British. Mrs Gandhi will win the heart of Burma if she brought these manuscripts as a gift to the Burmese people. The Burmese would also be very happy if India built a Buddhist temple in Burma collecting the soils of all the famous Buddhist temples in India. A similar gesture by the king of Nepal was very popular in Burma.



India's suggestion that Burma join the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) fell on deaf ears. Burma has withdrawn from all international and regional forums except the United Nations. It no longer belongs to the Non-aligned Movement of which it was once an active participant. It has spurned all suggestions that it join Asean as an associate member even though its relations with at least three of the Asean countries, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, are certainly very close.

To be sure, Burma has lately opened up a little to the outside world. The success of its economic plans depends on boosting exports. This year's target is a 25 per cent hike over last year's, but unlikely to be fulfilled because of world recessionary conditions. Burma's balance of payment position is getting worse, in 1980-81 it had a surplus of 218 million kyats (pronounced chat) (Rs 30 crore), but last year it had to swallow a trade deficit of 963 million kyats (Rs 132 crore). (The official rate is eight kyats to a US dollar but the dollar is openly and freely sold for 20 kyats or even more in the main roads of Rangoon.)

General Ne Win has made Burma a land for and of Burmese only... As a result there is a fairly large number of non-citizens, people of partial Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi origin who have no access to government jobs but who nevertheless seem to be making a comfortable living from petty trade and several dubious callings.

HOWEVER, Burma's economy is far from wobbling. In fact it has been doing pretty well in recent years. Burma is a country of immense natural resources including hydel power, petroleum, forestry and minerals. The Government has been going slow with development because it does not want to get locked to the rich nations beyond a moderate level, and it has closed its doors firmly on multinationals. As a result its foreign debt is small and bearable and its credit-worthiness is high. Still, Rangoon is not at all anxious to borrow liberally from the international commercial banks. Its policy of self-reliance is supplemented by a flourishing, indeed glittering, black market. Shops and bazars are flooded with modern commodities and fashion-wear is smuggled from across the Thai border —also partly the Indian border. Everyone does more than one job and people evidently have enough money.

The Burmese road to socialism is often attacked by its domestic and foreign critics for good reasons. But what it has done for the people of Burma is also noteworthy. With a per capita income of $181 (Rs 1,990), Burma is one of the poorest countries in the world. But the cold statistics of the World Bank do not reveal that the Burmese are amongst the best dressed people in Asia and certainly the cleanest, that they eat well and look healthy, that all the basic needs of the entire people are supplied at cheap rates at government shops spanning the entire land, that Burmese men have lived down their age-old reputation of laziness and that the status and respect Burmese women enjoy in their society can be the object of envy of women in all South Asia. Rangoon is one of the most safe and secure cities in the world in which women move about carefree even after midnight and where eve-teasing is totally unknown.

Herbert Hoover once described the Burmese as the "only genuinely happy people in all of Asia". They still look relaxed and carefree, always laughing or smiling and their women lend a grace to Burmese life that is rare anywhere in the world. There is also less disparity in Burma than in the South Asian countries between the highest and lowest paid government officials. A recent study quoted by the *Far Eastern Economic Weekly* says that a ranking military official would earn 3,000 kyats a month although his official salary is less than a thousand. The salary of the lowest paid official is about 300 kyats but he too perhaps makes 1,000 kyats by moonlighting or petty trading.

Ne Win has made Burma a land for and of Burmese only. The citizenship laws are so strict that only people whose parents are both Burmese are entitled to become citizens. As a result there is a fairly large number of non-citizens, people of partial Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi origin who have no access to government jobs and to subsidised articles but who nevertheless seem to be making a comfortable living from petty trade and several dubious callings. The Indian population has dwindled down to about four lakhs. Some 20 to 25 Indians depart by each flight, and possibly sometime in the next decade there will be hardly any Indian left in Burma. The Burmese doesn't care. He owes little to the rest of the world and has no desire to expand his international linkage; certainly not with South Asia.

The only country that plays a significant part in Burma's development is Japan, which has offered a $400 million credit and has been taking part in offshore explorations for oil. But Burma will take its own time to consume the Japanese credit. On the whole, the Burmese attitude to the foreigner has not changed very much from the time when Shway Yoe (a Scotsman who wrote some of the best books on Burma) observed wryly in 1882: "The best thing a Burman can wish for an Englishman is that in some future existence, as result of good works, he may be born a Buddhist and if possible a Burman." And that remains true even now. What the Burmese could best wish for Englishmen one hundred years ago, he probably does now for all foreigners, especially those who are not Buddhists.

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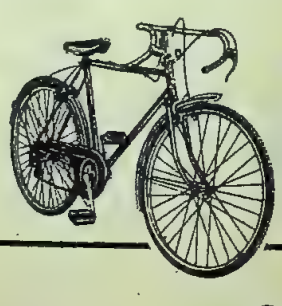
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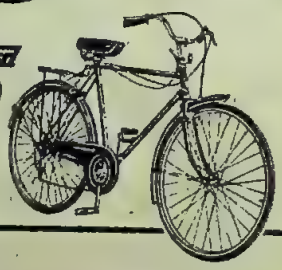


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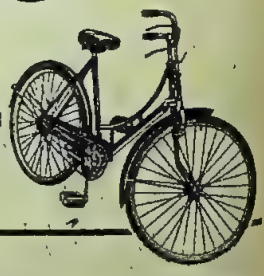
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Breathtakingly beautiful in a spectrum of attractive colours. Parallel Bars.



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An ideal bike for ladies and gents alike. A perfect blend of light weight, strength and durability.

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Exerciser
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CAR RALLY

THE FERODIAS of Bajaj Tempo in Pune are planning to introduce an off-road cross-country vehicle in the Indian market in collaboration with Daimler Benz of West Germany. Hindustan Motors in Bengal is also planning a similar move, while the market for light commercial vehicles has hotted up in recent months. In a clear attempt to pre-empt new manufacturers who will enter the market next year with vehicles in the three tonne range, the existing manufacturers of smaller-capacity vehicles are introducing vehicles that can take a heavier load, while the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO) has diversified from its line of heavy trucks to introduce a lighter model. Bajaj Tempo, Standard Motors and Mahindra and Mahindra have all introduced heavier vehicles in the recent past, some of them with new technology from abroad. The race is just as serious among the new manufacturers. Swaraj Vehicles hopes to be first on the market early next year, followed in quick succession by DCM-Toyota in April, and then Hyderabad Allwyn and Eicher Goodearth.

HOMESPUN YARN

THE GOVERNMENT has banned the export of the coarser varieties of cotton yarn. The Textile Export Promotion Council has been asked to stop registering export contracts in cotton yarn in the 1 to 40 count range. The ban is primarily meant to help the handloom sector, which depends on cotton yarn of lower counts, of which there is a serious shortage. The prices of the coarse varieties of cotton have risen sharply between 1981-82 and 1983-84 by Rs 1,400 per candy (two bales), according to one estimate. However, the ban may be lifted in a few months.

OIL PROSPECTS

THE GLOBAL rush for oil prospecting in India may have proved a dud, now that Chevron has failed to strike oil so far off the Saurashtra coast. But a new rush may now be in evidence, into oil drilling equipment. Domestic companies like Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra have been eyeing the field, and most of them are searching for suitable foreign collaboration in an area where they have little expertise. The first giant to make a foray is Baker International, which has global sales of $3 billion (Rs 3,250 crore), and which is setting up a modest-sized joint venture in India for the manufacture of bridge plugs, cement retainers and other "down-hole" equipment.

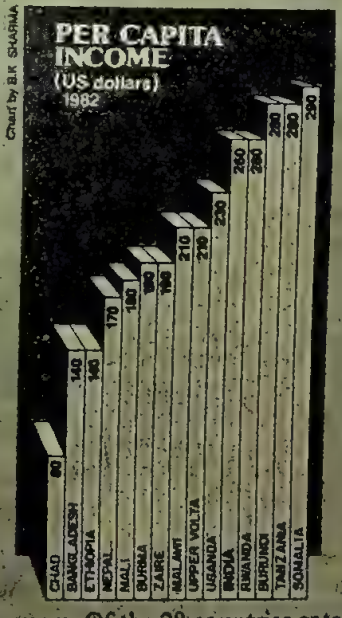
TO THE RESCUE

TRACTOR manufacturer Eicher Goodearth Ltd has run into an unexpected stumbling block in the course of its efforts to rescue namesake Eicher Traktoren und Landmaschinen Werk of West Germany, which it took from Massey Ferguson two years ago. Production at the German plant, turning out 600 tractors a year, came to a sudden halt last month after Massey decided to call in a large loan it had made to Eicher Traktoren before the company came under Indian management. Under the 1982 agreement, the loan was to have been repaid only after the German unit was back on its feet, and Eicher executives say they are unable to explain Massey's sudden hardline attitude. Eicher Traktoren's West German dealers are reported to be extremely upset, and Eicher Goodearth is thinking of rushing tractors from India to meet demand.

RUNNING AGROUND

BOOM-TIME is over at the massive Alang shipbreaking yard on Gujarat's Bhavnagar coast. With pressure building up against the import of ships for auction to ship-breakers, no new ships have been beached at the yard in recent weeks and by October most of the yard will be idle. If that happens, it will spell the end of an overnight success story, because the Alang shipyard had yielded a turnover of Rs 100 crore in its first year, and was expected to touch Rs 300 crore in this, its second year of operations. But that would have yielded six lakh tonnes of re-rolled scrap, and the prospect rang alarm bells in the offices of the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL). SAIL has been facing problems in selling its steel, and has been lobbying to ensure that the public sector Metal Scrap Trading Corporation (MSTC) does not go overboard in its enthusiasm for importing ships to feed Alang. The lobbying has now proved successful, much to the chagrin of the Gujarat Government.

DOWN THE LADDER



THE WORLD Bank's annual "World Development Reports" are becoming unflattering to India. The 1982 report listed India 19th from bottom in a ranking of per capita incomes. Last year, this slipped to 16th, and the latest report released last fortnight puts India 11th from the bottom. This is partly because some of the poorest countries have provided no information for the latest report, and are therefore not listed. But countries like Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi have drawn level or moved ahead of India in the rankings over the last two years. Of the 28 countries categorised as "low-income economies", no fewer than 12 had a faster growth of per capita income than India between 1960 and 1982.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

The Uncommon Market



PARIS: "Do you think Europe is down and out?"

You are asked this question wherever you go in Europe.

The Americans are, of course, convinced that Europe is a burnt-out case. "Western Europe, the proud old continent that dominated world history for two millennia, is stagnating economically and faltering politically," wrote *Newsweek* three months ago in a special report entitled simply 'The Decline of Europe', as if it was a settled fact. "After 30 years of nearly uninterrupted growth, the post-war economic miracle has spluttered and died out. World leadership in science, technology and commercial acumen has passed to the United States and Japan, perhaps for ever."

Not quite, or perhaps, not yet. I have just returned from a day-long trip which took me to Lyons, about 500 km south of Paris, and two atomic power stations that are under construction nearby. One of them, the Super-Phenix, is the world's first full-scale fast breeder reactor which is being built at Crey-Malville in south-east France. It will produce new nuclear fuel as well as electricity—hence the name breeder—and is expected to be the prototype for further fast reactors planned in France, and possibly other countries in Europe. The project is an entirely European concept, from beginning to end, and is being set up with strong support from the European Community. A similar project will be located in Germany. Neither the Americans nor the Japanese have anything comparable with the Super-Phenix. Not a single new contract for nuclear power reactors has been let out in the US in the last seven or eight years, while France has more than 20 new nuclear power stations under construction. Incidentally, the train that whisked me to Lyons from Paris did the 500 km distance in just 2 hours. Yet somehow most people think of Europe as a decadent continent and as Luigi Barzini, the Italian author, said, "the most useful function an Italian or a Frenchman can perform these days is to teach an American or a Japanese the proper temperature at which to drink his red wine."

The Europeans themselves must share the blame for the devaluation of their continent. "Europe is sinking and nobody seems to care, least of all the British electorate," wrote the London *Observer* on the eve of yet another economic summit, this time at Fontainebleau. The failures are spelt out in the statistics of economic decline, in the guttering steelworks of the Ruhr (which I happened to visit) and the empty workshops of Manchester (which I did not). There are millions in the dole queues (13 million in all) though you hardly notice them. Five years ago, European firms had 30 per cent of the world market in electric and electronic products; today, they have 20 per cent. In textiles, cars, machine tools, shipbuilding—even in washing machines where Italy once had a flourishing industry—Europe has been losing ground to Japan, the US and the rising economies of the Far East.

But, for some reason, the community has chosen to spend more and more

The European Community is essentially a political entity rather than an economic agency...

money on farmers to produce food which increasingly cannot be consumed and must be wasted or sold at a loss. The problem of the British budget contribution which Mrs Thatcher makes such a big fuss about is essentially a trivial problem, a puzzle for accountants rather than statesmen of one of the world's most enlightened regions. Farming in Europe is a highly efficient operation, far more efficient than in the US or Japan, and covers, on an average, no more than about 6 to 8 per cent of the labour force. Yet, from Athens to Brussels, and from Brussels to Fontainebleau, European politicians who should be busy with other more important things—industry and technology, for instance—have been burning midnight oil on a few decimal points—whether Britain should receive back 66 or 66.6 per cent of her contribution to the budget.

The real problem lies elsewhere, mainly in the continuing industrial stagnation and the incapacity of European planners to create new jobs. In the last decade, while western Europe lost 2 million jobs, the US created about 20 million. And since the current US recovery got under way, the gap has widened.

Unlike Europe also, the US has billions in venture capital available for the new businesses and has a culture that is more willing to take financial and business risks. European economies are more heavily invested in traditional industries like steel, heavy fabrication, etc and have been slow to move into new areas. Also, many of the new jobs created in the US are in service-related areas—everything from retail shops to airlines, fast-food chains to business consultants. Europeans, on the other hand, believe that in a welfare state, service is demeaning. A British miner does not mind mucking about in the colliery but would rather go on dole than be a waiter in a fast-food restaurant, though the work in some of the new restaurants can be more hi-tech than in a coal mine. A restaurant in my Paris hotel serves 200 meals at a sitting. The waiter or steward takes your order and punches it into a computer (there are four computer terminals in the restaurant) giving the code numbers of the dishes ordered, the number of the table and the time of order. Within ten minutes, the dishes arrive at the other end along with a computer printout. When you ask for the bill, the waiter punches again into the terminal and you are handed a computer-printed slip with all the information you require. If you are staying at the hotel, you give your room number and your name appears automatically on the bill. A restaurant is after all a service industry, with



European leaders at the Fontainebleau summit: varied problems

a great deal of accent on industry, and that is how it is organised.

BRUSSELS: The community headquarters has not changed much since I was last here about four years ago. But the main reception lobby is not as packed with visitors as it used to be and the town itself is rather quiet. Belgium has among the highest unemployment rates in the community and most Belgians complain about the high salaries paid to community bureaucrats. It is not, however, true that the people of Europe have simply stopped believing in the com-



munity or in Europe. "How can you begin to have faith in a bunch of Oriental-rug merchants who spend their lives in ludicrous bickering over household necessities?" Luigi Barzini is reported to have asked, before he died a few months ago.

The perception of what the community is and what it should be varies from country to country, but anyone who thinks that the community is about to pack up is in for a big surprise. There is little doubt that it is here to stay. Firstly, the man in the street does not think of the organisation in Brussels at all when he thinks of the community. He is conscious only of one thing, the grandeur of Europe as a community both in political and cultural terms. A Greek I met in the shadow of the Acropolis in Athens knew nothing about Mrs Thatcher's tantrums over the budget but when I asked him whether he was a European first or a Greek first, his reply was simple; all Greeks are Europeans first because they were the first Europeans. The Romans are of course the next Europeans and then come the Spaniards and the Portuguese, followed by the French and the Germans and so on.

Almost all countries of the community have had political and cultural links going back centuries. In the town hall of Antwerp, a famous diamond centre and the second largest city in Belgium, the town council meets every day under the eyes of King Philip of Spain and his queen Isabella whose giant empire once covered nearly the whole of western Europe including Belgium and Holland. Antwerp and, no doubt, Brussels, received its first royal charter from King Philip and it remains to this day its most prized possession. The histories of these countries, some small with populations no bigger than that of a metropolitan city in India, some fairly large but no larger than our states, are so intimately intertwined with each other that it is no more difficult for them to be Europeans than it is for us to be Indians.

There is in fact a great deal of similarity between India and Europe. Both are continents, though western Europe has less than half the population of India. Both are multilingual and, to some extent, multi-racial. But just as there is something called Indian culture, there is equally a composite European culture which transcends local history and language, and of course, local currency and laws. On the face of it, there is little in common between a taciturn Englishman spouting monosyllables in his warm beer and a garrulous Greek with his glass of ouzo on a bright Sunday morning. But there is much more in common between them than a Japanese and a Chinese, or, for that matter, between an Egyptian and a Zambian though both inhabit the same continent. And it is this commonness that is the basis of their common market, for the European Community is essentially a political entity rather than an economic or commercial agency, and if it is not as successful as it should be or should have been, it is precisely because it is being treated as another GATT or UNCTAD, which it definitely is not.

... and if it is not successful it is because it is being treated as another GATT or UNCTAD which it is not.

There are few Europeans who realise this and one of them is President François Mitterrand of France. Mitterand is revered throughout Europe as a genuine European statesman, on par with Konard Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. I watched him closely at Fontainebleau as he addressed pressmen after he and his other European colleagues had been able to clinch the long and unsavoury dispute with Margaret Thatcher over the few millions of dollars involved in the British budget contribution. Mitterand is stocky for a Frenchman, but his language is precise, the language of a poet or a literary man — which he is — than that of a politician on the rampage and he speaks as quietly as Jawaharlal Nehru used to do when he was not addressing crowds. He referred to the budget affair in passing as if it was not of much consequence, which of course it wasn't, and went on to bigger things, like the question of a European passport, a European flag and a massive European technology programme. Most French presidents and politicians refer to the French governments and often to themselves as 'France'. De Gaulle, for instance, always said, "France cannot accept this situation and has no alternative but to turn down the proposal," meaning, of course, that he could not accept the proposal. Mitterrand also reffered to himself and his government as France but not as frequently as De Gaulle used to do. On the other hand, he did not say that the European Community should do this or that, but Europe should do this and that, as if Europe was already, like France, a political entity on whose behalf he, as President of the European Council of Ministers, could make an official statement.

To Mitterrand, Europe is already a political entity and all that has to be done is to formalise the arrangement, beginning with a European passport and flag. It is of course easier said than done, but most of us came away from Mitterrand's memorable conference nearly convinced that amidst the usual problems about growth and unemployment and tariffs and budget deficits, the idea of a United States of Europe was steadily gaining ground and its first foundations were being laid in Fontainebleau.

The Danes have so many reservations about the community — they have strong links with the Nordic group of countries which also makes them somewhat suspect — that it is hard to come across a Dane who has nice things to say about it. But even the Danes were apparently impressed by Mitterrand's performance at Fontainebleau. I asked a lady from the Danish foreign office if she believed that the idea of a European passport was far-fetched. How long would it take? A year, perhaps?

No, she said promptly, two years.

It might be sooner than you think.

TEXTILES

The Permanent Crease

FROM riches to rags — that is how the story of the textile industry will be described in the years to come. Periodic cycles of recessionary and boom years have now given way to a permanent state of crisis. In Gujarat alone, eight mills have closed down in the last six months, on top of the 14 that pulled down their shutters in the previous two years. And across the country, a total of over 70 mills now lie closed, rendering over 1.5 lakh workers jobless.

Last fortnight, angry workers took to the streets in Ahmedabad, and pelted stones at the office of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), smashing windowpanes and the windscreens of cars parked in the area. Their protest was over the TLA's pacific attitude in the face of an unprecedented crisis. And 15 agitated MP's from the state submitted a lengthy memorandum to Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, warning of an explosive law and order problem if jobless workers continued to suffer.

Anxious governments in the state and at the Centre have tried to take quick action to tackle a rapidly deteriorating situation. In Delhi the Central Government set up a special committee to examine ways of reopening Gujarat's closed mills. And in Ahmedabad the state Government set up a special textile department, headed by H.K. Khan, a dynamic bureaucrat who is the managing director of the Gujarat Industrial Investment Corporation. Moving quickly, Khan organised fresh assistance of a staggering Rs 80 crore from the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) and three nationalised banks, in order to help 13 troubled mills, including six closed ones. And the department was studying the viability of all the closed mills in order to see which ones could be helped, and which were beyond redemption.

While this might be of some use, the problems underlying the crisis have already become endemic to the industry: a shift in demand away from cotton textiles, mismanagement, increasing competition from the powerlooms, and the failure of the textile units to modernise. A bank official in Ahmedabad aptly said that some of the looms in the textile units properly belonged in a museum, rather than on a factory floor.

There is little doubt, therefore, that some of the closed mills have no future ahead of them. And many of them have already been written off by the Government, industrialists, economists, trade unions, and even the mill workers. The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry feels there is no option other than to scrap unviable mills, and that Rs 60 crore will be needed to restart those that can be revived; even then, there is no guarantee that they will stay open for long.





SHUKDEV BHAGHCGH

Ahmedabad mill workers protesting (above) and anxious workers outside a closed mill: deepening crisis

The Central Government, meanwhile, is willing to consider nationalising only those sick units that it thinks are viable, because 11 units of the National Textile Corporation in Gujarat alone notched up a loss last year of Rs 11.09 crore, equal to the accumulated losses of the previous nine years. The four mills run by the Gujarat State Textile Corporation suffer an annual loss of nearly Rs 7 crore. The TLA in turn has veered round to the view that many mills will have to be scrapped, after paying compensation to workers. So when Khan told the TLA last fortnight that even those mills which will be reopened may have to retrench nearly 20 per cent of their workforce, TLA President Arvind Buch said that he was not against retrenchment provided the workers got some compensation.

But this accommodating stand by Buch has brought the workers' wrath on his head, and split the TLA down the middle. When workers demanded at a recent TLA meeting that street demonstrations should be held in the city, Buch insisted that workers must follow the Gandhian approach and refrain from violence. Finding himself isolated, however, he finally walked out of the meeting.

Meanwhile, some fire-fighting measures designed by the state Government to prevent an escalation of the crisis have yielded little by way of results. In June, the Government promulgated an ordinance to stop the arbitrary closure of mills, stipulating that a mill would have to give at least 90 days' notice before closing down, and that closure could be only after the Government gave permission. But days after the ordinance was promulgated, three mills — Manjushree, Swadeshi and Silver Cotton Mills — shrewdly circumvented the new fiat by putting up notices saying that the mills had stopped functioning but that workers would be paid wages.

There have been other provocations too, with the Government criticising many mills for what it terms "preplanned closure". This is a reference to hurried sales of grey cloth for ready cash shortly before they switched off their looms, with the sales fetching Rs 6 crore in the last month

alone. Most of the cloth sold in this fashion was material that had been hypothecated to the banks. In the case of the Sarangpur No. 2 mill, now lying closed, bank officials said they knew that the unit was heading for a shut-down because stocks were suddenly being sold off in an aggressive fashion. Said an angry banker: "It is high time we initiated criminal proceedings against some of the mills for selling goods hypothecated to the banks." And Prabhudas Patwari, former governor of Tamil Nadu and legal adviser to 25 textile mills in Ahmedabad, said: "The Government must now freeze the assets of all mill owners so that they do not get away like this."

In an escalating conflict that has brought about face-offs between the Government and industry, between workers and their unions, and between the Government and workers, a fresh dispute has therefore resulted with the Gujarat Government initiating criminal proceedings in court against Manjushree, Swadeshi and Silver Cotton Mills for defying the ordinance against closure. But a minor political storm has been kicked up over the failure to take action against Sarangpur No. 2, which is run by the Ambica group owned by the Harivallabhdas family. Solanki's political opponents charge that this is deliberate favouritism, flowing from Solanki's close association with Jaikrishna and Mrugesh Harivallabhdas.

Meanwhile, the Government has also offered several forms of financial relief to the troubled mills, including deferred recovery of sales tax, purchase tax and electricity dues for five years. The Government has also said it is ready to declare some mills as relief undertakings, so that they are exempted from power cuts. In a further unusual gesture, it has stood guarantee to the banks for loans brought by the closed mills.

Industry observers in the city doubt, however, whether many mill managements have any intention of reopening their closed units, because most of them have little stake left in the industry, and because most of the financial investment in the closed units has come in the form of borrowings. For example, Bhalakia Mills, which had 34,040 spindles, 590 looms and 20,000 workers, shut down in March 1982 and remains closed even today. The company had a share capital of only Rs 16 lakh, while borrowings from the banks totalled nearly Rs 4 crore. Said State Finance Minister Sanat Mehta: "A dispute which should have actually been between the mill workers and owners has now been cleverly converted by the managements into an issue that has to be sorted out by the workers and the Government. The workers now think that it is the Government which has to help them."

Given the long-term and fundamental nature of the problems that dog the industry, it is debatable as to how much the Government can do. But Khan retains some optimism. "This is a tough situation," he says. "And no state government has ever faced an industrial problem quite like this. But it does not defy solution. We may have to take some painful decisions, but that is the inevitable price of change."

Part of the price will inevitably be in the form of large-scale retrenchment, while there also seems little escape for many mills from permanently giving up their weaving departments and concentrating on spinning, because of the growing competition from powerlooms. Back in 1951, there were only 50,000 powerlooms. This rose to 6.4 lakh last year, while production in the unorganised sector rose from 1,010 million metres to 5,750 million metres. During the same period, production by the regular cotton mills has dropped from 3,750 million metres to 2,520 million metres. The powerlooms have the advantage of low overheads, flexible labour laws, low wages and superior looms, all of which make for far cheaper products, against which the organised mills cannot compete. If they are to survive, they will therefore have to adjust to the new realities before it is too late.

— RAMESH MENON

NTC

Fewer Options

THE IRONY is inescapable. While the Central Government last fortnight set up a special committee to examine ways of reopening Gujarat's closed textile mills, another committee that it had set up late last year presented its grim conclusion: three or more of the 22 heavily losing mills of the public sector National Textile Corporation (NTC) would have to be wound up. Said one of the committee's members: "The idea is to give a shock to workers who think government mills won't be closed down."

Nothwithstanding the unhappy state of NTC's problem mills, the Government is now likely to take over the more viable of the Gujarat units as well as some of the 50-odd others that have downed their shutters nation-wide over the past three years. A good number of them will probably be handed over to the state textile corporations, but some may be brought into the NTC fold, a prospect at which an NTC official shudders: "We don't want to be saddled with any more sick mills."

His lack of enthusiasm is understandable: NTC totted up a Rs 100.8 crore gross loss in 1983-84, and has accumulated a total net loss of a staggering Rs 411 crore since 1974-75 when the corporation was given charge of 103 nationalised mills. The loss would have been higher had not the Centre waived interest on its loans two years ago, and allowed a three-year moratorium on loan repayments. The loans now total a mammoth Rs 445 crore. Not one of NTC's nine subsidiary corporations made a profit last year; even NTC (Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry), the sole profitable subsidiary in 1982-83, was back in the red. On top of this, 22 other mills in Kanpur, Bombay and Calcutta which are yet nationalised but which NTC takes care of were plunging deeper into the red. Their losses mounted



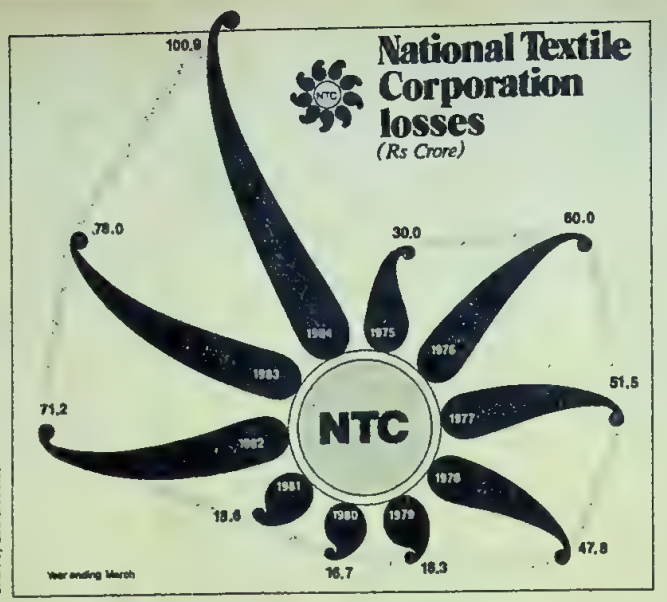
NTC's Bhattacharya: stout defence

from Rs 17.9 crore in 1982-83 to Rs 27.2 crore last year.

As an answer to the textile industry sickness, nationalisation and management by NTC is not therefore very convincing. Its losses apart, the corporation has also failed to sufficiently modernise the mills in its care. Most of the mills continue to produce unprofitable coarse and medium cloth instead of turning out high-value fine and superfine material, the corporation's bloated labour force has not been trimmed, the overdue organisational restructuring is yet to take place, corruption has often flourished un-

checked, and there is as yet no evidence to support the hope that the 125 mills will be restored to long-term viability.

Partly, NTC's problems are a reflection of the total industry's problems. Buffeted by competition from the officially protected handlooms and the flourishing powerlooms the cotton mills in the organised sector of the textile industry have found no room to manoeuvre in the cloth market, while the sharp increase in cotton prices this year has brought about an inescapable rise in production costs. NTC managing director H.P. Bhattacharya also cites the increase in wage and dearness allowance payments, power cuts in many states, the high cost of captive power generation, and the excessive labour force.



His explanations strike a responsive chord in spokesmen of the private sector mills. T.S. Sundaram, executive secretary of the 33-member Northern India Cotton Textile Mills Association (NICTMA), says that the price of the J-34 variety of cotton rose by 100 per cent between January last year and May this year. Says Sundaram: "An average spinning mill in the north with 25,000 spindles would make a cash loss of Rs 8 to Rs 10 lakh a month, which is a 15 per cent loss on the finished product." In such a difficult situation says a former NTC managing director, "NTC has been asked to maintain both employment and production at the least cost. But that cost will always be higher than that of private mills."

Bhattacharya argues further in NTC's defence that the organisation has tightened internal controls, set up a management information system, asked the subsidiaries to send in monthly self-appraisal reports, and in an effort to check corruption and bring about greater efficiency, started centrally monitoring raw material purchases, exports and a part of the total production. Also to NTC's credit, capacity utilisation has improved from 45 per cent at the start to around 70 per cent — higher than the current industry average. But the negative feature here is that capacity utilisation has dropped by a good 5 per cent in the last two years.

But these efforts have clearly not measured up to the task on hand. While almost all the corporation's mills have replaced their obsolete machinery, at a cost of over Rs 300 crore, a further Rs 374 crore will be needed in the next five years to update technology, with the better run mills getting the bulk of this huge investment. And Bhattacharya admits to coninuing problems of surplus labour: every 10th employee on the rolls is redundant, making for a total of over 19,000.

Some efforts to handle problems have also not worked out as expected. Corruption, for instance, used to be a major problem. Mill managers often had links with private buyers, who would hold back on purchases till the mill was strapped for cash and decided to sell at large discounts. NTC officials then insisted on the cloth being offered to the holding company at the price quoted by the traders, and the cloth would then be sold through NTC's exclusive retail outlets. Recalls another former NTC managing director: "We'd buy from the mills at a 30-40 per cent mark-up and the cloth would still be 5 per cent cheaper than that offered by private traders." But distress sales still continue in some mills.

THE RETAIL outlets began to incur losses, and a decision to close them down could not be implemented because of trade union opposition. The 394 outlets were finally handed over to the subsidiaries, which is no solution at all because, says a former NTC marketing official, the central organisation is not in a position now to build a brand image for its products or get proper market feedback on the cloth offered to consumers.

NTC also claims that it suffers a loss on the production of specified qualities of cloth, the prices of which are controlled by the Government. Nearly 36 per cent of the 900 million metres that NTC turned out last year was of such "controlled cloth", on which the Government gives a subsidy (Rs 53 crore last year). But NTC maintains that this does not make up for the full loss incurred. Textile department officials have disputed this, and an official of the National Cooperative Consumers Federation (NCCF), which is the sole concessionaire for NTC's controlled cloth, claims that NTC has in fact refused to allow a greater part of controlled cloth production to be offloaded on to handlooms. The official also argues that NTC's controlled cloth is of poor quality but not much cheaper than that produced by private mills, and that it therefore does not sell very well. "This is because of the high overheads and inefficiency of NTC," he argues.

There are yet other problems. Officials in the NCCF talk of stock figures being vastly inflated and production is usually not of the kind asked for by the marketing outlets. Sales, meanwhile, have not been helped by a running dispute between NTC and NCCF over Rs 20 crore which NTC claims is owed to it, but which NCCF disclaims. Says NCCF Managing Director R.P. Srivastava, "They (NTC) can say whatever they want to. When funds are blocked, we cannot go on supplying goods to state agencies."

While none of this can help NTC's overall marketing effort, the former managing director of the corporation said that "the real issue is NTC's choosing of the soft option in marketing. It merely off-loads more than a third of its production on to NCCF. But whether in marketing or other functions, soft options get you nowhere."

After more than a decade of effort, the nationalised mills have run up losses of over Rs 400 crore, with no date in sight when profits will start coming in. The debts have piled up, the quality of the cloth produced is criticised by those responsible for selling it, there are too many workers, and not enough of the modern machines that could make the mills viable. With more private sector mills likely to be taken over, piquancy is mixed with industrial crisis to make for a difficult situation that offers no obvious solutions.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

DMCC

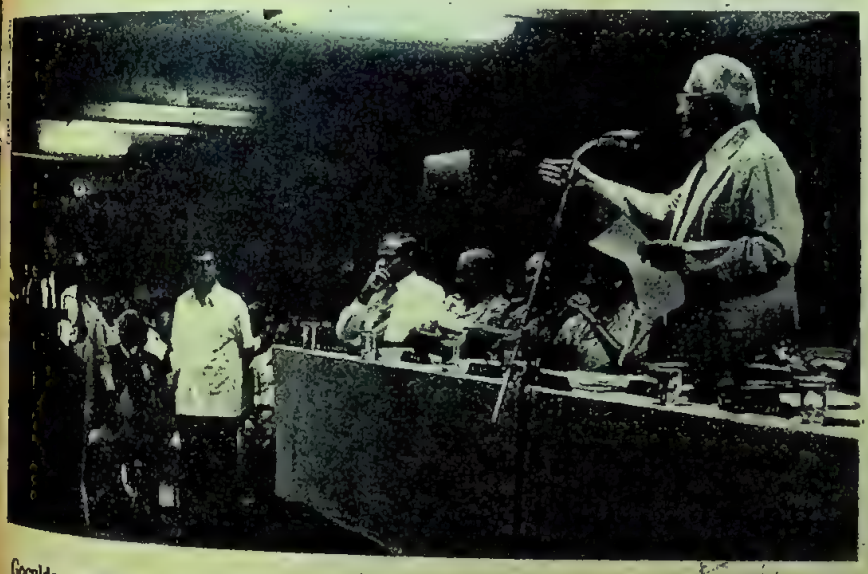
Disputed Claims

BATTLE was joined again at the end of last month for the control of Dharamsi Morarji Chemical Company (DMCC) with the descendants of the Rs 50-crore company's founders making yet another bid to oust their cousin-by-marriage and company Chairman, R.M. Goculdas. But in the early hours of the morning of June 28, at the end of a marathon session of the company's annual meeting of shareholders, Goculdas emerged triumphant by winning a poll with a thumping two-thirds majority.

That, however, was not the end of the matter, for the dispute only seemed to be hotting up further. The multi-pronged fight against Goculdas being waged by the descendants of DMCC's founder, Ratansi Morarji, has been in the courts since early last year. And at the end of last month, yet another petition was added to the two already pending in the Bombay and Delhi High Courts. Many more seemed likely to follow, including one to challenge the last shareholders' meeting on grounds of misconduct, the wrong use of proxy forms by the management and various violations of company law.

The tussle, in DMCC (which had sales last year of Rs 50 crore and gross profits of Rs 3.4 crore) is a murky mix of family disputes and high corporate drama, and dates back to the death in 1978 of chairman and managing director P. Morarji. With two other male members of the family having died earlier, the principal surviving members of the promoter's family comprised three women: Urvashi, Chandraveli and Avantika, who together held more than 30 per cent of the company's shares. And they invited Goculdas to take over as chairman. He in turn brought Urvashi and Chandraveli Morarji on to the company board, and invited Avantika to attend meetings as an observer.

But discord set in by 1982, and a series of rapid changes saw the Morarji members being virtually excluded from the company's affairs. Avantika began voicing her disapproval of the way the company was being managed, and was asked to stop attending board meetings. In January last year, she filed a suit in the Bombay High Court alleging that Goculdas had not disclosed his personal interest in deals made ostensibly for the company's benefit. And soon after that she applied to the company law board for an investigation of the company's affairs.



Goculdas answering shareholders at the annual meeting: messy controversy

Six months later, Chandraveli found herself removed from the company's board of directors when Goculdas took the extraordinary step of proposing this action at last year's annual meeting of shareholders. At this year's meeting Avantika made a determined bid to get on to the board, but Goculdas ensured her defeat in the poll. Said Goculdas: "The simple fact is that they don't deserve to be directors. They have done damage to the company with their bickering."

But it is difficult to dismiss the string of charges against Goculdas and the company management as mere "bickering". For the Morarji family's main complaints are:

► that the fertiliser company's profitability has taken a steep dive since 1978, when Goculdas took charge;

► that the quoted value of the Rs 50 share has slumped from Rs 250 in 1978 to around Rs 100 today, and that the once blue chip is now traded only listlessly;

► that Goculdas has been unable to explain deals with two companies, Toluechem and Nirada Teknocast, deals that smack of either impropriety or plain bad sense;

► that Goculdas has promoted Udaipur Phosphates and Fertilisers, a competitor for DMCC, and sacrificed DMCC's interests by ceding markets to the new company and promoting its products.

In her high court petition, Avantika goes into the leasing of the Tolue-chem chemical factory, charging that this was an unsound business decision taken in order to help the loss-making Toluechem repay loans taken from another Goculdas firm. DMCC Managing Director J.L. Thakkar is also named in this connection because his wife, along with other employees and ex-employees of DMCC, was a shareholder in Nirada Teknocast, a dummy company which acted as the buying agent for the fertiliser company. But Thakkar argues that though the Tolue-chem decision resulted in a loss of Rs 72 lakh for DMCC, it was a valid business decision at the time.

Regarding the promotion by Goculdas of Udaipur Phosphates and Fertilisers, members of the Morarji family allege that DMCC not only transferred technology to the new company, but commissioned its plant on a turnkey basis, and ceded markets to it along with giving it permission for the use of DMCC's established trade mark "Jahaz Chaap". But when the Morarji family protested on the trade mark issue, that particular move was aborted. Said Avantika: "Goculdas is sacrificing DMCC's interests to feather his own nest."

Both Goculdas and DMCC's managing director deny that the company will suffer from the Udaipur deal, arguing that the company gets a commission on the sale of Udaipur products. Goculdas continued to write off complaints by the Morarjis as the unreasonable demands of women who do not know better.

The prolonged dispute has brought the company and Goculdas adverse publicity, and he can hardly wish away strong opposition from a determined group of vital shareholders. Clearly, DMCC's "Jahaz" is steering through troubled waters, and the future is unlikely to be smooth sailing for either the company or its controversial chairman.

— CHANDER UDAY SINGH

IDL CHEMICALS

Boardroom Fireworks

FIREWORKS are only to be expected in a company that manufactures explosives and detonators, but not normally in the boardroom. But if recent events are anything to go by, the boardroom of IDL Chemicals in Hyderabad has become an unsafe place, with sparks flying in all directions.

Last fortnight saw the resignation of V.C. Katoch, executive director of the company (which had sales in 1982-83 of Rs 40 crore and profits of Rs 5.5 crore). Shortly before that the chairman and managing director had left after a flurry of skirmishes with IDL's biggest shareholder, Nitro Nobel of Sweden, founded by Alfred Nobel of peace prize fame.

After M. Varadarajan retired as managing director, he insisted that he continue to remain a director of the company, leading to fresh squabbles. The board met and passed a resolution removing him from the board altogether, only to meet again the same afternoon and revoke that legally questionable decision. Before he left Varadarajan had himself sought to remove two directors, but a letter he wrote to the Government in this connection came under fire, he was forced to withdraw the letter—which he did—and in an extraordinary move the board then directed him not to write any further letters without its sanction.

This fierce infighting has been accompanied by shouting matches, complaints to and investigations by the Company Law Board, and incessant jockeying for support by the two main combatants, Varadarajan and Nitro Nobel. At one stage the 12-member board was split evenly down the middle. Over the last six months, however, Vardarajan has gradually lost support, and found the majority ranged against him.

IDL Chemicals was initially promoted in the early 1960s as Indian Detonators Ltd, a wholly Indian-owned company with Hungarian collaboration. Then, in an effort to get more modern technology, the company went in for a series of foreign shareholding partners: first Atlas Chemicals, then Dow Chemicals and finally, in 1976, Nitro Nobel. In each case, the condition for giving major shareholding rights to the foreign collaborator was a promise to help the Indian company technologically.

Atlas opted out after it was gobbled up by ICI of Britain, whose Indian subsidiary is IDL's competitor. And Dow had to sell out after it sold its own explosives factory in 1975 and was therefore not in a position to help IDL in its operations. Varadarajan now argues that his battle with Nitro Nobel started after the Swedish company failed to live up to its commitments to help IDL export its products, diversify its product lines, set up joint research facilities, and start joint ventures abroad. Nitro Nobel was supposed to help IDL export between Rs 3 crore and Rs 4 crore annually, but unfortunately this figure was never reached and exports through Nitro Nobel are now zero, while IDL has been able to export far more on its own steam. Says Varadarajan: "We could have sold these 40 per cent shares to Indian shareholders, but gave them to a foreign company in return for their commitment to help us in our operations. We have not got this help, but Nitro Nobel is now getting a 36 per cent return on their investment."



Cartoon by NINAN

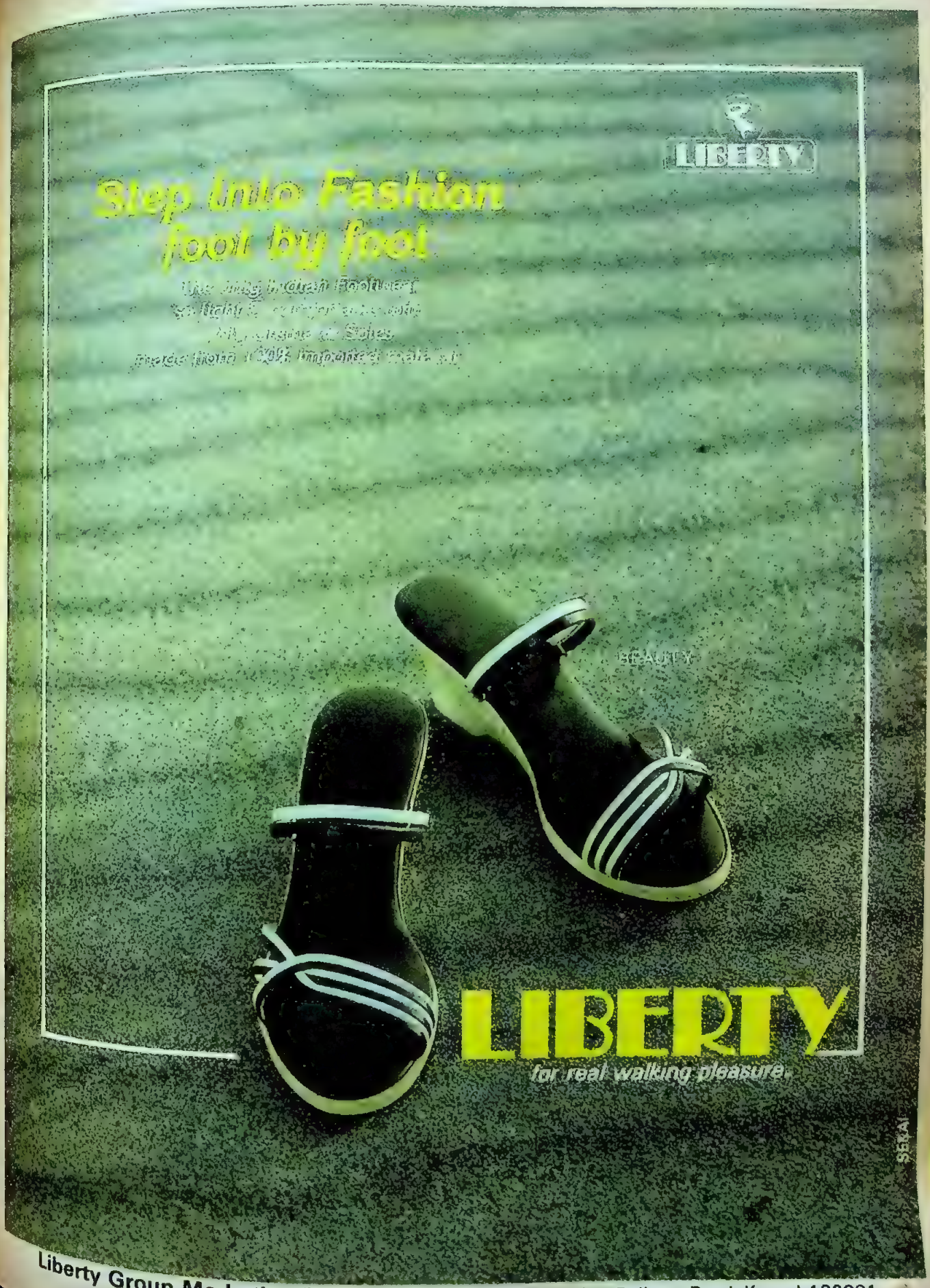
However, IDL directors who have lined up with Nitro Nobel in an increasingly messy fight have a different story to tell. They charge Varadarajan with helping a series of companies promoted by his relatives by getting IDL to give them orders for either supplying goods to IDL or selling its products, which have often commanded a premium on the market. In none of these cases, they allege, did Varadarajan disclose his personal interest.

It is further pointed out that Nitro Nobel helped IDL in a number of ways: setting up a joint venture, Astra-IDL, to manufacture bulk drugs, setting up the IDL-Nitro Nobel Basic Research Institute in Bangalore, giving technical support for a metal cladding and rolling mill complex, and evaluating various diversification projects that IDL did not follow up or could not get government approval for. Finally, IDL's export slacked off because of quality and packing problems.

And Varadarajan got IDL to give loans to and buy shares in Wavin, a Delhi-based company, without disclosing that he was a major shareholder in Wavin. Varadarajan counters that he did help his relatives' companies, but that these were not counter to IDL's own interests, and that his own interest in the deals was always disclosed, this being part of the official records. He also argues that Nitro Nobel gave no real help for the research institute, that the technology for the metal cladding and rolling mill complex came from du Pont and not Nitro Nobel, and that the investments in Wavin provided good returns till 1982. Contacted for his comments, Wavin Managing Director Keshav Prasad confirmed that Varadarjan's involvement in Wavin is well-known, and that the company had been doing well till labour problems and other troubles hit the company after 1982.

Whatever the truth of the charges and counter-charges, the fireworks at the explosives company are likely to continue, with Varadarajan insisting that he remains a director on the board, the board majority disputing this, and pressure likely to be mounted on the Government to ask Nitro Nobel to divest its IDL shareholding. This might not get very far, since the new IDL management that has come into place after Varadarajan's and Katoch's departures sees no problems arising out of the Nitro Nobel shareholding. Nevertheless, the peace that Alfred Nobel sought for the world at large is likely to elude his company, Nitro Nobel, and IDL for some time to come.

—T.N. NINAN with CHANDER UDAY SINGH



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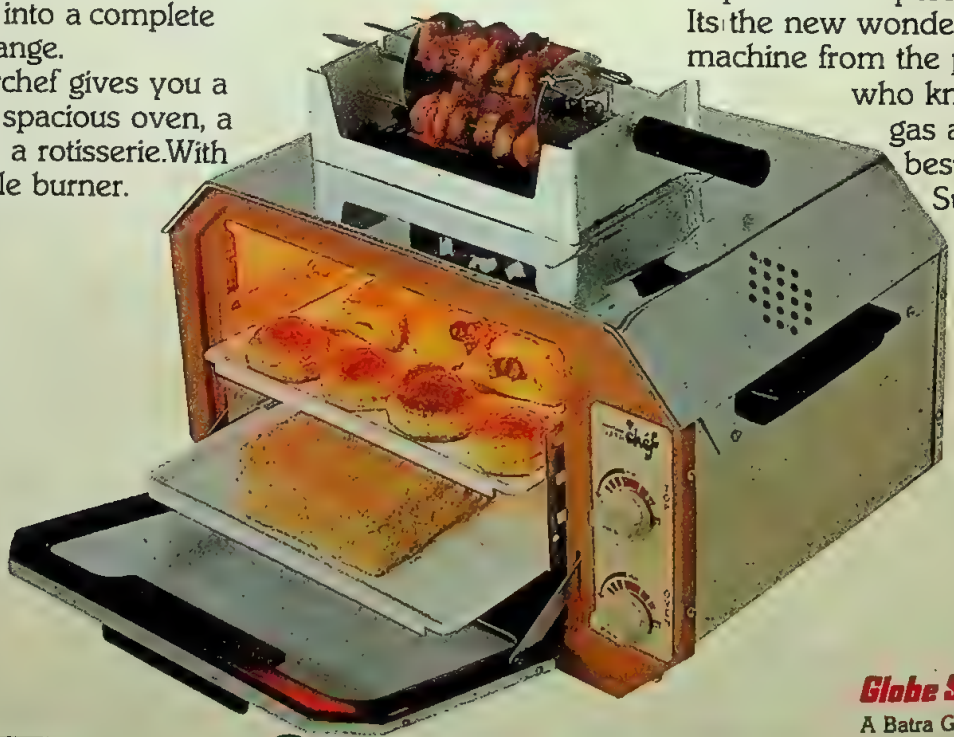


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UK ASIANS

In the Best Company

NOBODY has really arrived in the world of British business until he has won recognition in the exclusive clubs of the City of London. And Indian businessmen, increasingly familiar in British boardrooms, are finally making it big in the capital of the former empire.

Indra Kumar Sethia, chairman of the House of Sethia, has recently been elected to the Council of the Institute of Directors, whose president is Lord Errol of Hale. So has Narinder Saroop, the smoothest of the British Indian leaders, with an aristocratic visage and impeccable county accent. The first Asian or Third World executives to be so honoured, they now go regularly to the institute's swank new premises in the former United Services Club in Waterloo Place to confer with their English colleagues beneath portraits of old imperial soldiers — Wellington, Kitchener and Field Marshal Sir Colin Campbell, later Lord Clyde.

Meanwhile, R.K. Bagri, who started Metdist 10 years ago and built it up to a £55 million-a-year (Rs 82.5 crore) business, has been gradually climbing the rungs of the tradition-bound London Metal Exchange. This year he was rewarded with a directorship, the first Asian or Third Worlder to be thus recognised. Also, Saroop runs the influential Durbar Club, in which most of the big British and Indian businessmen are members, and which has Mrs Thatcher as a patron.

The subcontinent's presence has come a long way from the London branch representatives of old and established Indian houses like those of the Tatas and Birlas. There have appeared in London over the past decade, as Narinder Saroop puts it, "a number of really big businesses owned, managed and headed by Asians in the UK". A conservative guesstimate of the annual turnover of the entire Indian and Pakistani business community in the UK would be £3,000 million (Rs 4,500 crore).

Swraj Paul, 53, controls an annual turnover of £150 million (Rs 230 crore) and is one of the most successful of the Indian barons. With his engineering background from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), he became convinced that there was a market for small- and medium-sized steel pipes of a certain kind. Starting small with a £5,000 loan, he moved into the business, and Natural Gas Tubes has invested about £6 million and employs some 90 people.

Paul has also formed the Caparo Group, which acts as the private holding company for all the various enterprises which have now come into orbit around Natural Gas Tubes. They cover a wide range of engineering, oil exploration, hotel and property development, tea, shipping and investment companies.

The typical new Indian tycoon in London is a British national, like Paul, and may have been brought up in England from an early age, or emerged from the tragic exodus of businessmen from Idi Amin's Uganda. Indra Kumar Sethia has lived in Britain since he was a child of two. He was trained as a chartered accountant before entering his father's jute, wool and cotton trading enterprise and found himself at only 25 as the family's choice to take the chair. In the nine years since then he has expanded the commodity trading base into shipping, insurance, manufacturing and travel, and brought the annual turnover up to £100 million.

Abdul Shamji was one of those expelled from Uganda, where he left behind a considerable empire of trading and



R.K. Bagri, president of the Indian Chamber of Commerce in London, has an enterprise that sells on a global basis with a turnover of £55 million (Rs 82.5 crore).



I.K. Sethia has expanded the base of his family enterprise into shipping, insurance, manufacturing and travel, bringing the turnover up to £100 million (Rs 155 crore).

manufacturing enterprises. Arriving in Britain with virtually nothing except the clothes he stood in and the credit he had with the banks, he has now created an even larger empire in England. With hotels, commodity trading, and manufacturing of vehicles, components and handbags, he claims a turnover of more than £40 million (Rs 60 crore).

Trading under the name of Gomba Group of Companies from an elegant address in Park Lane, Shamji's pet project is his Scottish truck plant of Stonefield Vehicles. He had been assembling cars in East Africa, and is now in the same business for African and Asian markets.

R.K. Bagri, president of the Indian Chamber of Commerce in London, began by running a subsidiary of an Indian trading company but then started his own enterprise, marketing at first in India and the Far East but now selling on a global basis with a turnover of £55 million a year.

Saroop, the aristocrat of them all, is a professional director rather than a specialist, sitting on the boards of companies like Capital Plant International, which specialises in project development and financing—the Kapuni fertiliser complex in New Zealand being a recent example. Saroop is also a Conservative councillor in Kensington and Chelsea and stood as a Tory candidate in Greenwich in 1979.

THESE big Indian businessmen are only the flag-bearers of a large number of much smaller businessmen who have also made their presence felt in Britain. This writer's local newsagent, one of those countless Patels, initially commended himself by being the only newsagent in the area who would offer delivery to the door. Now he has bought up not only the neighbouring grocer's shop but also his Italian competitor five doors away. "In this kind of business you have to work hard for long hours, and sacrifice your own convenience," he explains. "They wanted to take their three-week summer holdiays, but my wife and I can never do that together." Now his son is about to start in the restaurant business, at a higher level.

Hard work and long hours mark the success of some of the bigger businessmen too. "We are used to hard work," Bagri of the Indian Chamber of Commerce explains, "and people who work for you are in turn influenced by how hard you work yourself." Both big and small businessmen also feel at home in a business which they own, where they can be totally committed and motivated, and can communicate that commitment to the people they employ. Paul believes in showing growth and profits by maintaining "the best attributes of a private family company, being modest in our ways and dealing fairly with others".

A common feature of Indian businesses in Britain is that they are relatively small and family-like in their size of staff. Bagri employs only 35 (of whom five are Indian), Sethia only 75 (of whom fewer than 10 are Indian). The Lalvanis of Binatone (electronics) employ no relatives at all. Shamji has about 500 employees in the UK, "and all my executives are British," he says.

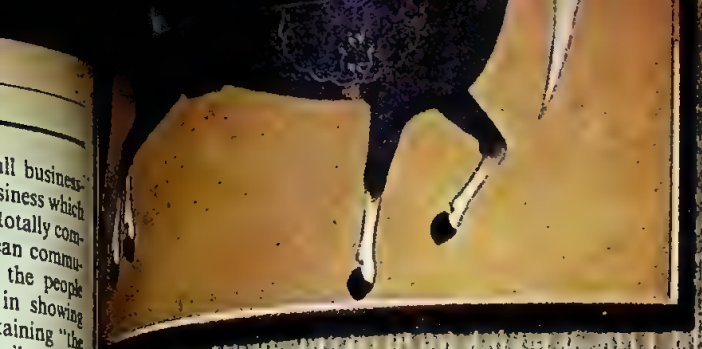
But the family interest comes out when you ask about their sons. "He is my right-hand man," says Bagri, as if surprised to have to explain. The Sethia son is still at school, but "we hope he will join the firm", while Shamji's sons are being groomed at the University of Texas and are hoping to join Harvard. Swraj Paul has his son Akash on the board of at least six of his companies. Saroop, the lone



Arriving in Britain with virtually nothing, Abdul Shamji created an impressive empire. With hotels, commodity trading and the like, his enterprises now claim a turnover of more than £40 million (Rs 60 crore).



Narinder Saroop, the aristocrat of them all, is a professional director, a Conservative councillor in Kensington and Chelsea, and stood as a Tory candidate in Greenwich in 1979.



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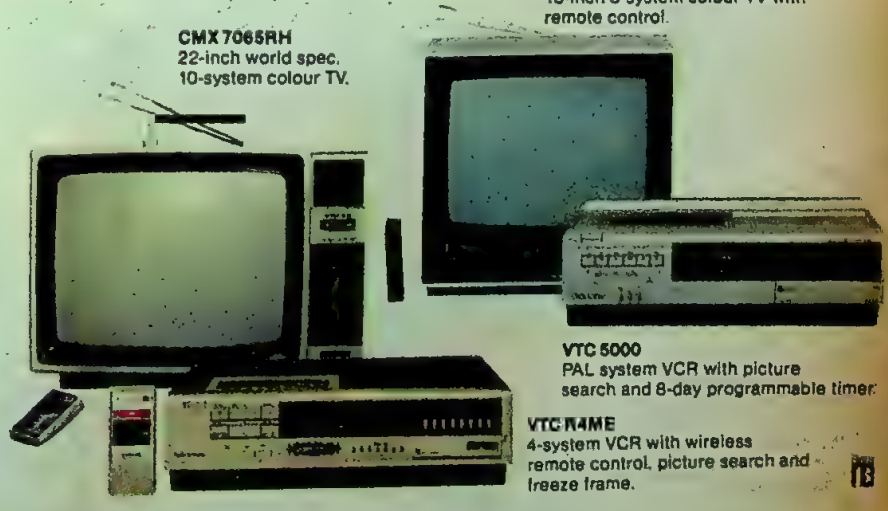
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professional, says drily that his son is "resting among merchant banks", the latest being Warburg.

But Sethia is not so successful in keeping his large brood of entrepreneurial cousins together. His nephew Rajendra went his own way after taking an economics degree in the late 1960s, building up a commodity and bookmaking group around ESAL—which is in trouble over unpaid debts from Africa. Another nephew, Nirmal Sethia, left Indra Kumar's House of Sethia in 1977 to form his own N. Sethia London Ltd. That was soon after two of Indra Kumar's cousins—Ranjit and Sampat—arrived from India to join the House of Sethia. To add to the confusion, Rajendra, Ranjit and Nirmal are blood brothers, and yet there is no shared ownership among them.

Many of these successful men have trading as their main activity, but a good number are poised to go into manufacturing in a big way. There is already an array of Indian ownership of production units: the Bhardwajs and Chandarias in textiles, the Patels in chemicals, and Paul in engineering. Now Sethia is "testing the water" with a small paper conversion unit at Crayford, and is actively looking for other quoted companies with a manufacturing base. Bagri's Metdist is also "looking" for manufacturing investment in the UK.

Earlier, the British had seen Indian enterprise in their midst with, for example, Ravi Tikkoo's shipping interests. But he is now in the kinder tax climate of North America, and it is the kind of manufacturing activities that are launched by others that constitutes the more durable investment.

The Indians also have an eye for buying an existing manufacturing enterprise "cheap" from the receivers or off the peg, when a previous owner opts out. The Hiranis are now running Belhaven Brewery, and the Okhais the James Keikker shoe business. No false pride prevents them from recognising the value of buying from the receiver. Shamji is making his Glasgow plant, obtained this way, with his own component manufacture elsewhere; he is diversifying the production line and is winning important defence orders in Malaysia and elsewhere in South-east Asia. In contrast to this pattern, Paul bids relatively high on the stock exchange, and has been able to turn around a number of companies that were earlier in the red. As Paul says, the British system is tolerant of such take-overs, with procedures more open and transparent than in India. But whereas other Asian investment in Britain—from Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—has been mostly through a new plant or enterprise, the Indian thrust is through the take-over of existing companies, and this is always a little more vulnerable to criticism based on envy, chauvinism or chagrin.

THE MOST interesting case of an Indian businessman in Britain spreading his wings in India is probably Binatone, run by the two brothers Gulu and Pratap Lalvani. They left India for training in England as heirs to their father's pharmaceutical business, and now, 30 years on, they are about to launch a Rs 5 crore consumer electronics factory outside New Delhi. They do so with the authority of executives who have Japanese and Korean engineers working in their own factory at Milton Keynes (bought from Rank Xerox) to train local British operatives in the assembly of TV sets and similar equipment.

Pratap and Gulu Lalvani left India 30 years ago for training in England as heirs to their father's pharmaceutical business. They are now about to launch a Rs 5 crore consumer electronics factory outside New Delhi.



The Asians like the business climate in Britain, finding an "unconscious affinity" with the system here, having been educated on the English pattern and being familiar with English company law, tax procedures and commercial practices. They claim not to be handicapped by racial prejudice. "There is no organised or deep-rooted prejudice affecting the Asian business community," Bagri declares. Saroop, who has been involved with this question politically, puts it carefully but more enigmatically, when he says that "the degree of racial prejudice is more than can be identified, but less than people imagine or fear".

One of the thousands of British Patels, who prefers to remain anonymous because of his experiences with British bureaucrats, was also sent for training to a leading British pharmaceutical manufacturer, to be told casually that, of course, as an Indian he could not expect to reach the higher ranks of the company. He took the hint and left as soon as he was trained, to start first a small chemist's shop of his own and eventually a large pharmaceutical manufacturing company with an annual turnover of £15 million. Resentment is one of the possible incentives for this kind of success, though this man himself is fiercely bitter about being shut out from a rather notoriously cartelised industry.

The position would be better if the Indian business community were more united, but there is much rivalry and jealousy among them. The Sangam group of the Hinduja brothers keeps firmly to itself, tight-lipped and uncooperative. Saroop tries to keep them all in loose harness in his Durbar Club, while Paul organises the Indo-British Association. There is an Indian Chamber of Commerce in London with Bagri as the current president, but it carries little clout in the highly charged and active Indian businesses and industry in Britain.

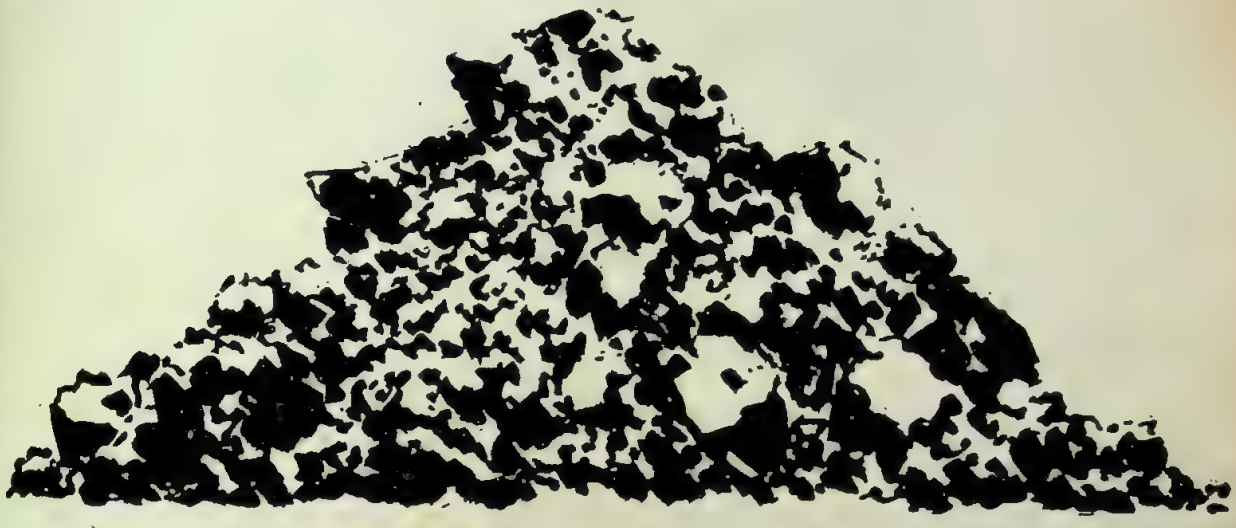
Sethia believes that the efforts of the Thatcher administration will soon enable the UK economy to "go through the roof". After 79 years on the slide, he believes the British economy to be on the verge of a renaissance. The UK, Shamji asserts, has "everything to offer" by way of business opportunities. If the British economy does indeed break through its barriers, those who stand best to gain include the Indians who have in the past decade transformed the British image of the Indian businessman from the High Street newsagent to the Park Lane millionaire.

—DICK WILSON in London



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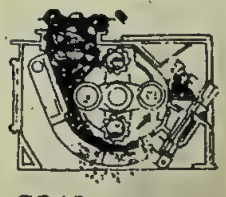
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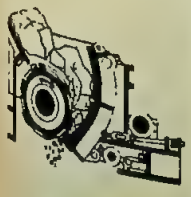
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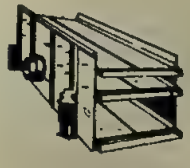
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The Jumble Sale

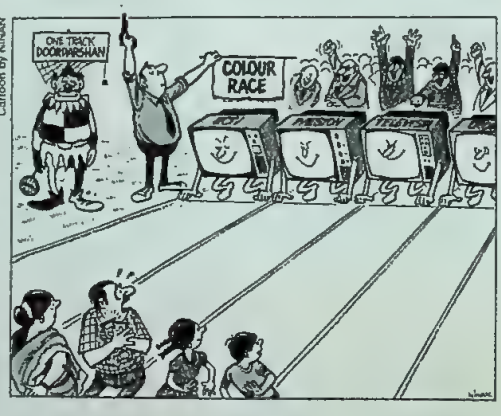
THE GOVERNMENT has always been thought of as a miser when it comes to handing out the precious pieces of paper called letters of intent and industrial licences. Over the last few years, however, that curmudgeonly attitude appears to have undergone a sea change and one of the areas where the hand that taketh and giveth has been embarrassingly liberal is the colour TV industry. Last month, when the dust in Delhi's Udyog Bhavan had settled, it was found that the ministry had authorised a licensed capacity of 11 million colour TV sets, spread over more than 350 units. The demand for colour TVs over the next year is estimated to be 800,000 and, as the chairman of a market leader says wryly in what is probably the understatement of the year: "We've got competition."

The Government's decision to give the go-ahead to virtually all comers — including a street food vendor in Delhi's Chandni Chowk — was obviously motivated by its massive Rs 232 crore expansion plan for Doordarshan scheduled to cover about 70 per cent of the population by March 1985. Between July and the end of 1984, 20 to 30 transmitters are to be installed every month. The Indian TV Manufacturers Association, whose 75 members produced one out of every five black and white sets sold last year, is gearing to produce 80,000 colour sets this year. The demand for black and white sets for the next year is estimated to be 1.2 million, and that for colour TVs for 1985–86 to spurt from 800,000 to 1.2 million.

At the moment, however, there appears to be a lot of pent-up demand for colour TVs. The public sector Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL) has 40,000 people on its waiting list for a 51 cm model fitted with an electronic tuner. Says a spokesman of the company: "We will not be able to clear the list of those who booked on the opening day, December 15 last year, for another two months." The private firms say that they did not make the mistake of taking orders which they could not possibly fill for a long time; says J.S. Jhaveri, managing director of Crown TV, which is turning out 120 sets a day: "It is a buyer's market now and no one wants to damage his credibility by grabbing orders he can't fulfil."

With hundreds of units jostling for space in an overcrowded market, there is bound to be a market shakedown. Industry Ministry sources admit that not more than a third of the units licensed will really take off. At the moment, 20 firms have already gone into production, and another 20 are scrambling to start up by July, realising that an early start means the difference between life and death.

The rush has also caused everybody to take a long, hard look at two basic elements: price and quality. Most private manufacturers are peeved over the Rs 5,000-for-a-colour TV balloon floated by the Government last year, at a time when most sets were selling for double that sum. Prem Vachani, chairman of Weston Electroniks Pvt Ltd, argues that there is no way a quality set can cost Rs 5,000: "Most of the components will have to be imported, so such a price is impossible." However, ECIL is already offering one set for Rs 5,650, excluding taxes, and there seems to be no reason why the colour TV segment of the market should not see the kind of price drops which have occurred in the black and white sector, where economy 12-inch models are going for bargain prices of Rs 1,200.



In fact, a few private manufacturers are already offering models for less than Rs 8,000, which is a considerable improvement over last year, when prices around Rs 10,000 were the rule. V.P. Luthra of Televista Electronics Pvt Ltd warns, however, that the argument that the cheaper sets sell the best is not always correct. Says he: "Our Rs 1,100 black and white set is not selling very well. I think the customer is willing to pay more for a good machine rather than get a cheap one which might not work very well."

But competition changes many equations, and a good sharp dose of it might just force Luthra and others to change their minds about quality sets at lower prices. A large tablespoonful of that dose is likely to come from Binatone International Ltd, the highly successful London-based concern of Pratap and Gulu Lalvani which is planning a giant step forward in India with an investment of Rs 5 crore in a modern, automated consumer electronics factory near Delhi. Says a confident Pratap Lalvani: "There is place for a fully-automated assembly line operation which turns out sets that don't have to be sent to the repairman every month."

Resident TV manufacturers contest the claim that Binatone's sets will be significantly better than theirs but the first reaction to the Lalvanis' enterprise is already evident. Crown TV is in the process of setting up its own modern factory — ironically, close to Binatone's — and other firms are also toning up their act. Jhaveri admits that the days when substandard kits could be foisted on the consumer will be over in a few months. "For one," he says, "there will be at least 25 well-known brands hustling for the market. For another, most of the relay stations will be in places where it won't be possible to have a service centre, so when the set leaves the factory it will have to be good."

Quality is crucial for a third reason: there is not likely to be much variety. All the tubes that the Electronics Trade & Technology Development Corporation is importing — picture tubes are a canalised item — are 51 cm in size. Then, accessories like remote controls are not of much use in a country which still offers only one channel. And there are basically just two types of sets: those with rotary tuners and others with electronic tuners, which cost more. Given these constraints, the manufacturers can only fiddle with looks.

Of course, there is no such creature as an Indian colour TV industry yet. At least 80 per cent of any given set is made up of imported parts. The basic circuits are all imported too: Weston is sticking with Hitachi, Televista with ITT and so on. "Let's face it," says an executive of a large firm, "nobody really wants an Indian TV." But there is one aspect of the industry which will be thoroughly Indian: the mad scramble as the sellers and the buyers play their parts in the forthcoming soap opera.

— JAGANNATH DUBASHI

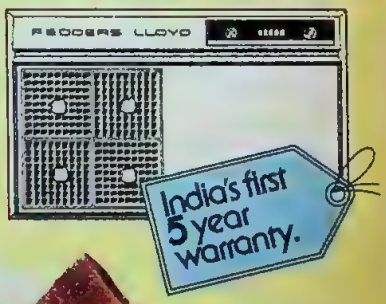
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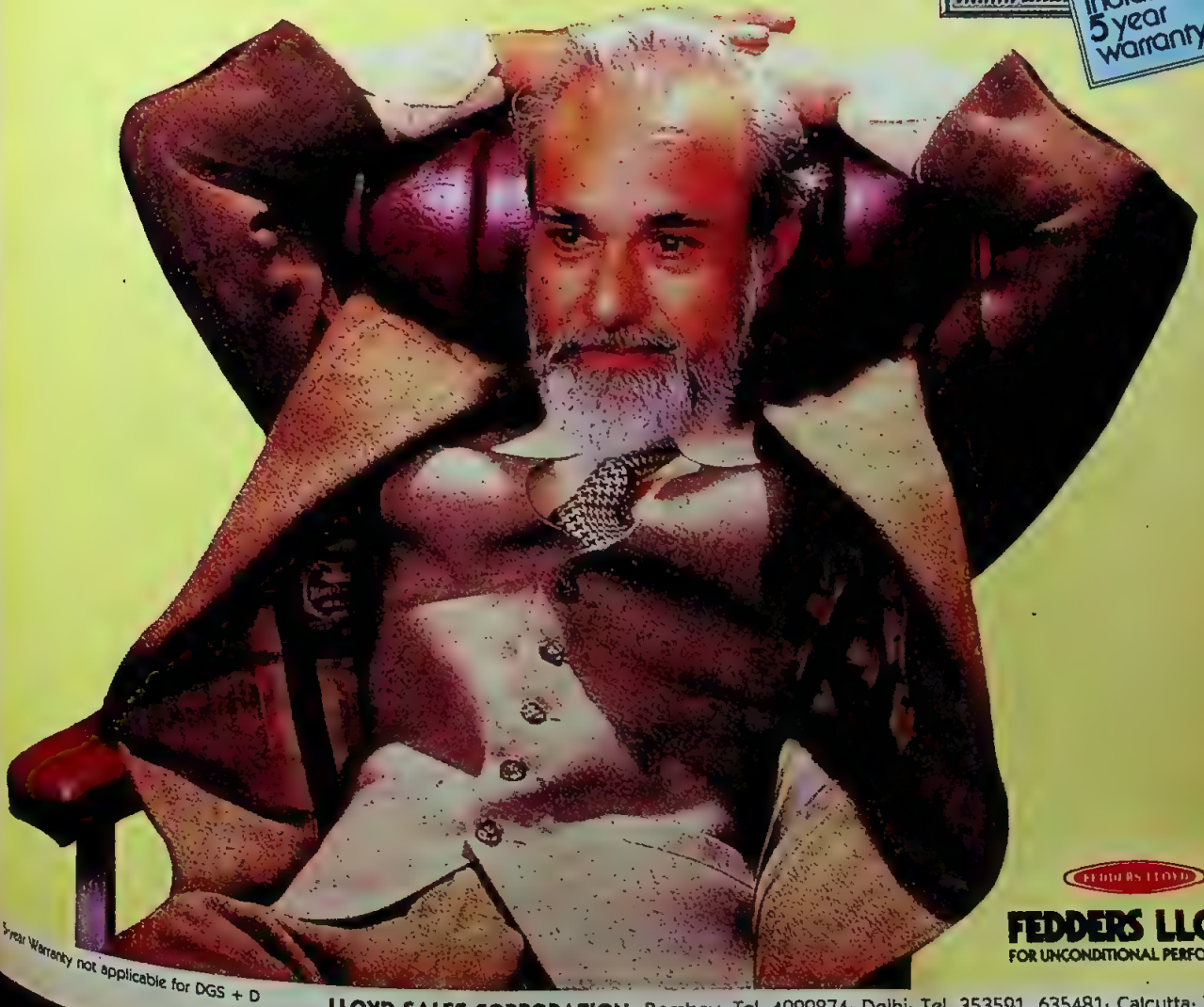
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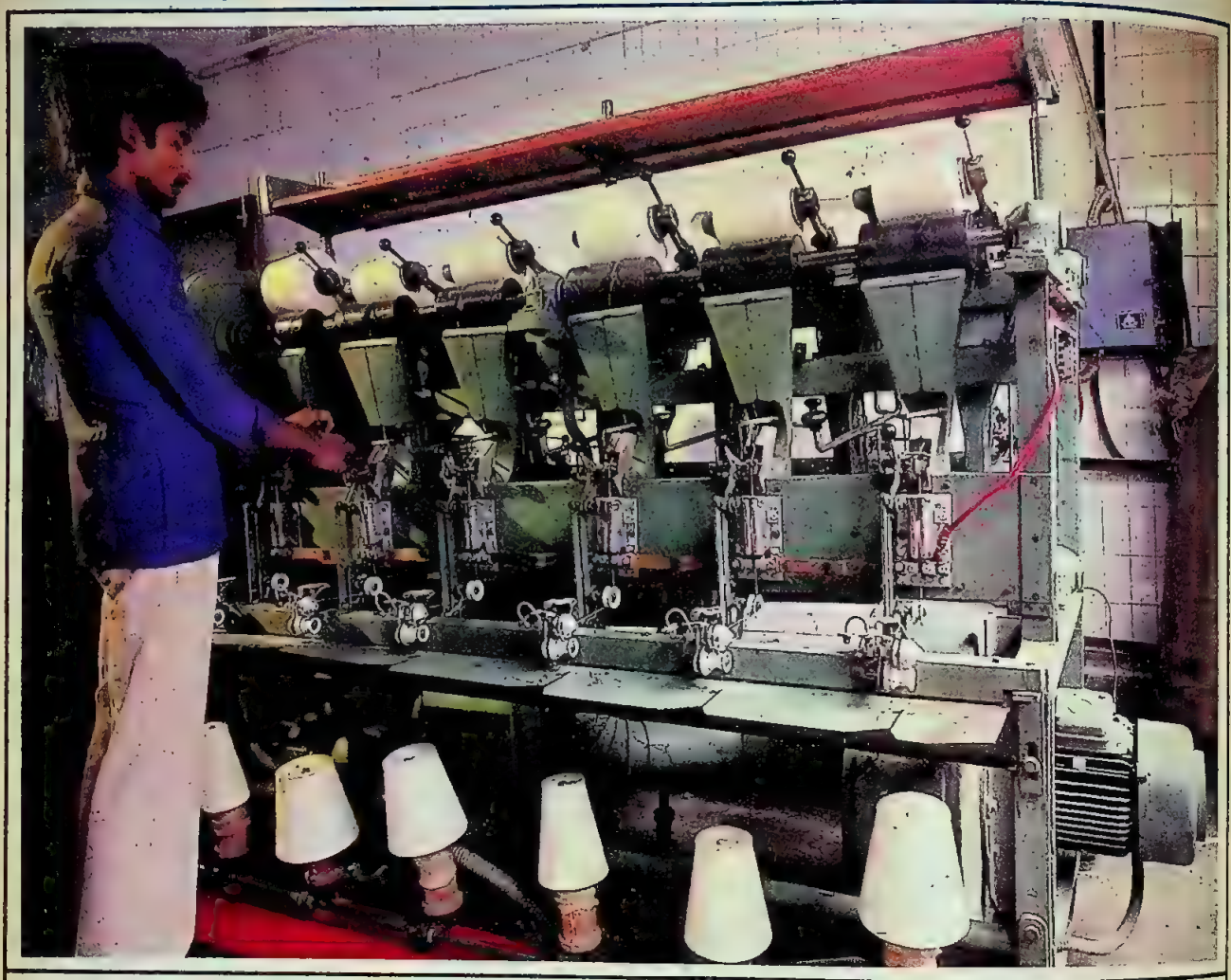


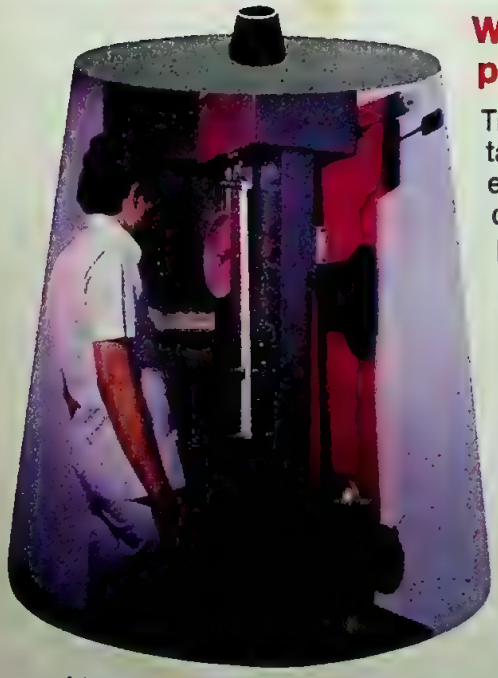
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ESCORTS

Crying Wolf?

JUST when the Swraj Paul-Escorts affair seemed to be settling down to a predictable pattern of shareholders' meetings and court hearings, last fortnight saw an unexpected twist to the story. In a surprise court affidavit, Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda argued that one of the companies through which Paul had bought shares in Escorts did not belong to Paul at all, but to a Swiss bank, Bank Hofman AG of Zurich. That set off a fresh controversy, with Nanda alleging in court that the company was therefore not at all eligible to invest in India as a non-resident company.

Earlier, Caparo Group had filed its annual return to the London companies registration office, stating that all but one of the company's 605,622 shares of £1 each were held by Caparo Investments (Jersey) Ltd, and the remaining shared jointly by Caparo Investments (Jersey) and G. Rowland. Caparo Investments is Paul's holding investment company. But Nanda said in his affidavit that subsequently all the shares of Caparo Group had been transferred in three lots to Bank Hofman in March 1983.

Paul however dismissed this seemingly sensational disclosure with an angry barrage of comments. Speaking over the telephone from his London office, he told INDIA TODAY that Bank Hofman was only holding shares for him as a trustee, and that this had been done to handle any estate duty complications that might arise in the event of his untimely death. To corroborate this, he read out a statement that he had got from Bank Hofman, which said: "This is to confirm that we are holding shares of Caparo Group as trustees for safe custody." The statement went on to clarify that no loans had been advanced against the shares, and that the shares were free of any lien on them. Said Paul: "Nanda is illiterate not to know that it is common practice in England that people get banks to hold shares as trustees. Can I ask Nanda not to mislead the press and waste the country's time, and to go back to school and learn business." Presented with this explanation, Nanda remained unconvinced, arguing that the records clearly showed a change of ownership.

While it remains to be seen how the Bombay High Court will treat this disclosure and Paul's disarming explanations, the negotiations between Nanda's and Paul's representatives have made little headway. Nanda said that Paul's elder brother in India, Jit Paul, had not been in Delhi for some days, while Swraj Paul declared from London that, "There is no question of my negotiating with Nanda until he registers my shares."

Asked about Jit Paul's conversations with Nanda's lawyers, Swraj Paul said that Jit Paul had only been a "listener" and that he did not do anything more than give Nanda's lawyers a hearing. "I will not negotiate with Nanda and nobody has been authorised to negotiate on my behalf." His comments indicated, however, that there was some difference of opinion between him and Jit Paul on the subject. Nevertheless, his unequivocal declarations left little doubt that the negotiations, such as they were, would get nowhere despite Nanda saying that he was willing to continue talks. The ball, therefore, was back in the Bombay High Court, where hearings on the case are continuing. The judgement could be available in a fortnight's time. —T.N. NINAN

HOSIERY INDUSTRY

Vested Interests

THE CONFRONTATION is over, the problems are not. That about sums up the state of West Bengal's troubled hosiery industry and its 50,000 workers at the end of a record 144-day strike last fortnight.

The workers have got much less than what they struck for: a hike in total wages of Rs 31.70 per month, which is less than a quarter of what they had originally demanded. And though individuals like Ajit Paul, a semi-skilled worker in a small hosiery unit in Calcutta's Sovabazar area, argue that "if we had not gone on strike, we would have got nothing", there is little doubt that the unions were forced to back down after the strikers' staying power had begun to wane.

If the workers' reward for a prolonged and crippling strike is a pittance of an increase in wages, the industry that employs them is in no better shape. At the time of Independence, the state's hosiery units dominated the national market with an 80 per cent share. That figure is now down to barely 25 per cent, while rival centres like Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu account for half the all-India market.

Both the workers and the majority of the 2,200 units in the state have suffered because of the increasing tendency to "de-organise" the industry. The yarn suppliers and the bigger manufacturers, who control the vital marketing network, have deliberately encouraged the system of contracting out work to small units, which get squeezed because they have no control over either the price of yarn or that of the final products. "We are completely at the mercy of the big manufacturers," admits Bijoy Saha, a contractor who has a small weaving unit. Saha and hundreds of others like him cannot invest afresh to modernise machines or increase labour productivity, so that the industry has by and large slipped into obsolescence despite government incentives to help modernisation.

In fact, the small contractors accuse the more powerful manufacturers of deliberately prolonging the strike in order to increase their production in units outside the state, and to profit from the sellers' market created by the strike. Said, S.C. Mukherjee, secretary of the Bengal Hosiery Manufacturers Association: "Can the big manufacturers be faulted if they feel that their investment will be more productive in other states?" Mukherjee also blames the Bengal industry's woes on repeated labour trouble. But the workers can hardly be blamed. The last strike, in 1978, was over the failure to implement a minimum wage notification of 1976.

Meanwhile, the big manufacturers' strategy of encouraging extreme fragmentation of the industry in order to keep



PRADIP SAHA

A small hosiery unit: obsolescent

costs down is having negative effects in Tiruppur too. Since April 20 this year, hosiery workers in Tiruppur have been on an indefinite strike which is yet to be called off.

Clearly, there can be little hope for either workers or middle-level businessmen in an industry that operates under Dickensian conditions. The only units to prosper so far are the big, organised ones like Pioneer, Kohinoor, Gopal Hosiery, Siddeswari and P3, all of which were paying their workers more than the new minimum wage even before the strike began. And they have refused to make further increases in wages to their workers. For their workers, plus all the others who have crept back to their workstations after being drained by a long-drawn-out battle, the future can only look bleak. —INDRANIL BANERJIE

THE MARKETS

Fair Weather

THERE are signs that things are at last beginning to look up on the stock-market front. The index has shot up by more than 11 points or 4 per cent—from 261 to 272—in less than a fortnight and is still going up. Most scrips have moved a little bit this way or that—very few have stayed put—but a good many leading scrips have moved up substantially. Tata group shares seem to be in the limelight with Associated Cement in the lead, followed by Tata Steel and Tata Chemicals. Century Spinning, Food Specialities, Kirloskar Cummins, Motor Industries, National Organic and Premier Automobiles have also been marked up. The companies that have shed a few points but are none the worse for it are also a fairly representative lot. The movement is widespread and is likely to cover the whole market in the next few weeks, though at the moment it seems to be confined only to Dalal Street.

What has perhaps helped the sentiment is the general upsurge in industrial production which is now of the order of 6 per cent a year, more or less double the rate at which industry was marking time less than six months ago. Prices are also better as recession is now more or less a thing of the past. Steel, for instance, is no more in the doldrums and whatever may be the case in the public sector, Tata Steel is having things more or less its own way. The company's Chairman, J.R.D. Tata, has said that every tonne that is produced by the company is sold. This was not the

GWALIOR RAYON

Labour Pains

GWALIOR Rayon's pulp plant at Mavoor, 22 km from Calicut, has had more than its share of problems: strong local protests because it was polluting the environment, disputes with the Kerala Government over the supply of eucalyptus and bamboo, the main raw materials, and constant labour trouble. The problems boiled over again last fortnight when a dispute with a new and rapidly growing trade union with a Naxalite tilt, led to the closure of the pulp division, temporarily throwing 2,000 people out of work.

Barely a year ago, in May 1983, the factory had reopened after an eight-month lock-out, and industrial peace seemed assured because of a new agreement with the trade unions. Since then, however, the Gwalior Rayon Organisation of Workers (GROW), led by Aynoor Vasu, has taken up the cause of an odd-job workforce of 700 permanent reserve workers. These get only 13 days of work every month, but Vasu has been asking for more; and the workers are backing him to the hilt even if the other 12 unions at Mavoor are not.



Saboo (left) and Vasu: opposite camps

All 2,000 workers at Mavoor may, in the process, lose their jobs permanently—not because of the labour dispute but because of the older tussle between the company and the state Government over eucalyptus supply. Starved of raw material, the management could use the labour dispute as an excuse to close the plant permanently.

The management has been asking for increased raw material supply at the same concessional rates offered to the public sector Hindustan Paper Corporation at Veloor, further south in the state, and the issue is now before the Kerala High Court. R.N. Saboo, executive president of the Mavoor plant, says the factory was set up on the basis of an agreement with the Kerala Government in 1958, according to which 2 lakh tonnes of bamboo and eucalyptus would be supplied annually on a royalty of Rs 1.74 per tonne of bamboo and Rs 23.49 per tonne of eucalyptus. But over the years these rates have increased over 100 times for bamboo, and 21 times for eucalyptus. Asks Saboo: "Why should I buy eucalyptus for Rs 479 when Hindustan Paper gets it for Rs 24?"

As an interim measure, the high court has asked the Government to supply wood to the company at Rs 120 per tonne. But Saboo says: "The raw material that we get is only for three months, and the plant has to work at one-third its capacity." He confirms the fears of workers when he says that unless there is a long-term solution to the raw material problem, there is little point in opening the pulp unit.

The state Forest Minister, K.P. Nooruddin, insists that "there is no question of lowering our prices or giving them wood at the rate we supply to Hindustan Paper", and uses as justification the Price Fixation Act of 1978, which exempted HPC, but not Gwalior Rayon.

Meanwhile, the dozen trade unions in the factory offer a confusing array of opinions. One union leader argued that Vasu of GROW had played into Saboo's hands. "Saboo wanted the closure and Vasu obliged him, leaving the workers in the streets," he said. But Vasu charges the non-GROW unions with being in Saboo's pocket. Says Vasu: "The union leaders were hand in glove with Saboo, and some of them were themselves agents for contract labour." This, he says, was the reason for their accepting the condition that the 700 reserve workers would get work for only 13 days in the month. And GROW was formed last December when P.M. Padmanabhan, a civil rights lawyer in Calicut, suggested taking care of workers.

That may have been a legitimate move, but whether the insistence on a better deal for them will boomerang now remains to be seen. If the raw material question is not solved, the labour dispute could come in as a handy weapon for the management to announce permanent closure.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Calicut



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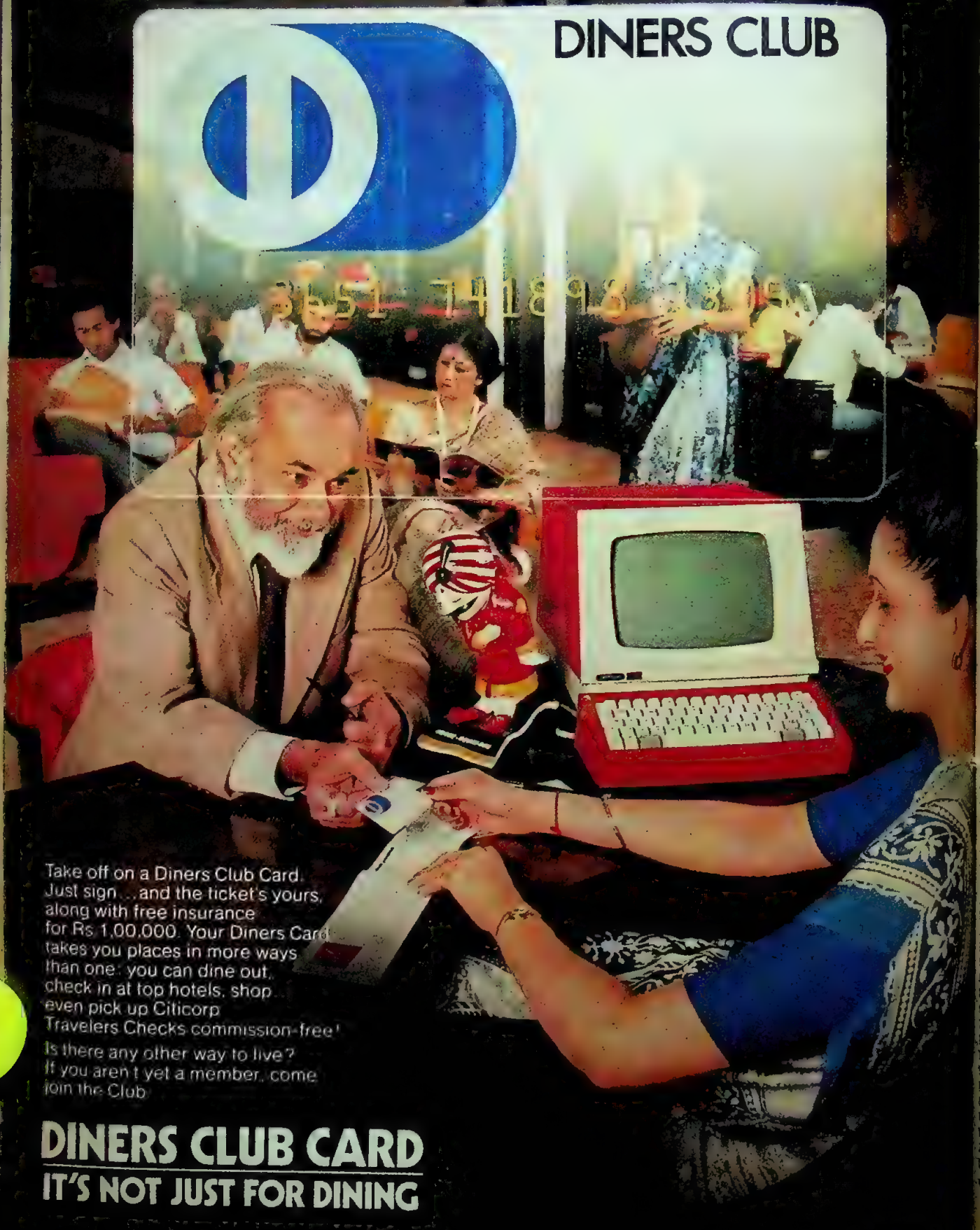


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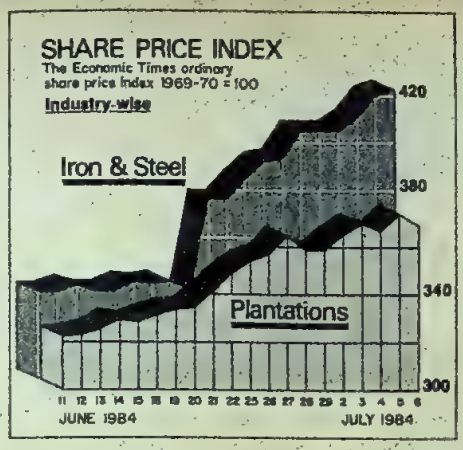
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Siemens	47.50	42.00	42.00	1.25 –
SKF	38.81	28.06	35.81	1.91 +
Sterling Products	57.00	43.50	45.50	2.00 +
Tata Chemicals	66.50	53.25	66.50	6.00 +
Tata Steel	326.50	245.50	326.50	61.50 +
Tata Tea	426.00	398.00	402.00	6.00 –
Tatanagar	63.00	50.65	61.80	4.60 +
Union Carbide	28.25	24.80	29.25	4.65 +
Usha Martin Black	22.50	19.50	20.00	1.50 –
Voltas	395.00	335.00	346.00	6.00 +
Wheels	43.50	28.50	33.25	1.00 +
20th Century Leasing	48.00	32.00	34.00	2.00 +
Unit Trust	14.35	12.60	12.60	1.05 –



case last year. Tata Steel has of course a substantial modernisation programme on hand and this has now apparently begun to show results. The efforts at upgradation in technology are beginning to pay off in other industries, though the results may vary from industry to industry.

Most companies have expansion plans on the drawing board. Hindustan Aluminium have a Rs 80-crore expansion programme on hand, though the company did not do all that well last year. Ashok Leyland which did only slightly better has embarked on an expansion programme worth Rs 270 crore to raise its production capacity to 40,000 trucks a year by 1987. Nearly all the leading companies have similar programmes in hand, explaining the new air of buoyancy in the market.

There is also something of a boom in the tea market with prices of leaf as well as dust ruling at record levels. The price of leaf in Calcutta auctions is about 50 per cent higher than this time last year and that of dust nearly 30 per cent more. Prices in London are also firm and likely to persist throughout the current year. Tea company shares should be watched carefully for companies like Tata Tea, Jayshree and Warren seem to be on to a good thing and shareholders may be in for much more than higher dividends.

In an atmosphere of general euphoria, it pays to maintain one's cool and not be pushed by mass sentiment. This is perhaps as good a time as any to pick and choose, starting with, say, the engineering companies which have been under the weather for some time but should now be expected to do better. For who buys all that steel that the steel companies make? Engineering companies, of course. Many of them have not moved even a point in the course of the last year, or maybe even two years, and it is high time they got a break. It is not easy to pick winners among them but the effort should be worth its while.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES

July 5, 1984

	LATEST	Change on month
ET Commodity Price Index*	301.0	3.2 +
Chemicals	350.5	7.3 +
Industrial Fibres	225.8	9.5 +
Metals	392.0	0.5 –
Gold, standard Rs per 10 gm	1940.00	45.00 –
Silver, .999 Rs per kg	3355.00	155.00 –

SHARES

July 5, 1984

ET Share Price Index*	272.5	11.8 +
Cement	212.5	20.0 +
Chemicals	234.7	12.8 +
Engineering	469.8	10.8 +
Fertilisers	265.8	12.0 +
Paper	534.2	19.2 –
Rubber Goods	186.3	9.3 +

MONEY

June 15, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.5%	nil
Call Money Rate, Bombay	9.0%	0.5% –
Money Supply		1.9%
Bank Deposits		1.1%
Foreign Exchange Assets		5.3% –

* Index—1969–70 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.5511	9.4347
Austria	Schilling	100	57.1496	56.5040
Bahrain	Dinar	1	29.4644	29.2583
Bangladesh	Taka	100	44.6230	44.3118
Canada	Dollar	1	8.5513	8.4581
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.0960	1.0828
Egypt	Pound	1	9.2303	9.1959
France	Franc	1	1.3055	1.2915
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.4472	1.4198
Indonesia	Rupish	100	1.0933	1.0856
Iran	Rial	100	12.3836	12.2972
Italy	Lira	100	0.6542	0.6481
Japan	Yen	100	4.7085	4.6594
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7699	0.7448
Kuwait	Dinar	1	37.1715	36.9123
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8897	4.8140
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8162	0.8106
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6890	0.6842
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5512	3.5129
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8065	0.8000
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.2832	5.2226
Spain	Pesets	100	7.8720	7.0101
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4458	0.4428
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3739	1.3587
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.7884	4.7121
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6509	0.6454
Thailand	Baht	100	44.5526	44.4936
UK	Pound	1	14.9332	14.7934
USA	Dollar	1	11.4100	11.3050
UAE	Dihram	1	3.0182	2.9972
USSR	Rouble	1	13.6496	13.5544
W Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0072	3.9578

These rates were supplied by The Bank [illegible]ye Ltd. New Delhi and quoted between the banks.

LOSS

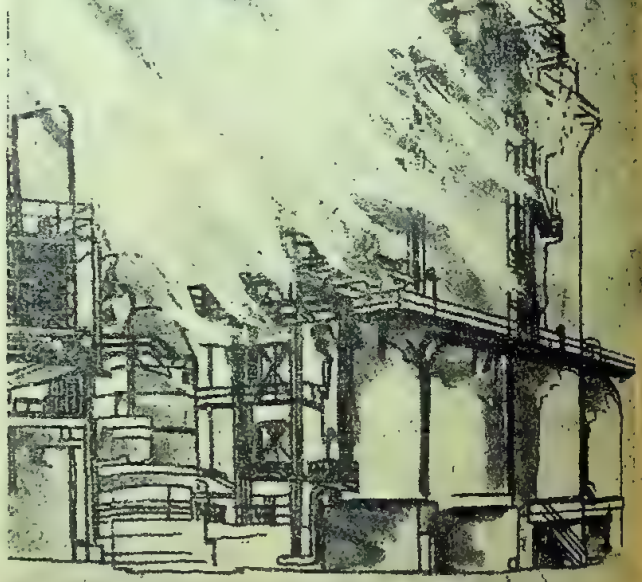
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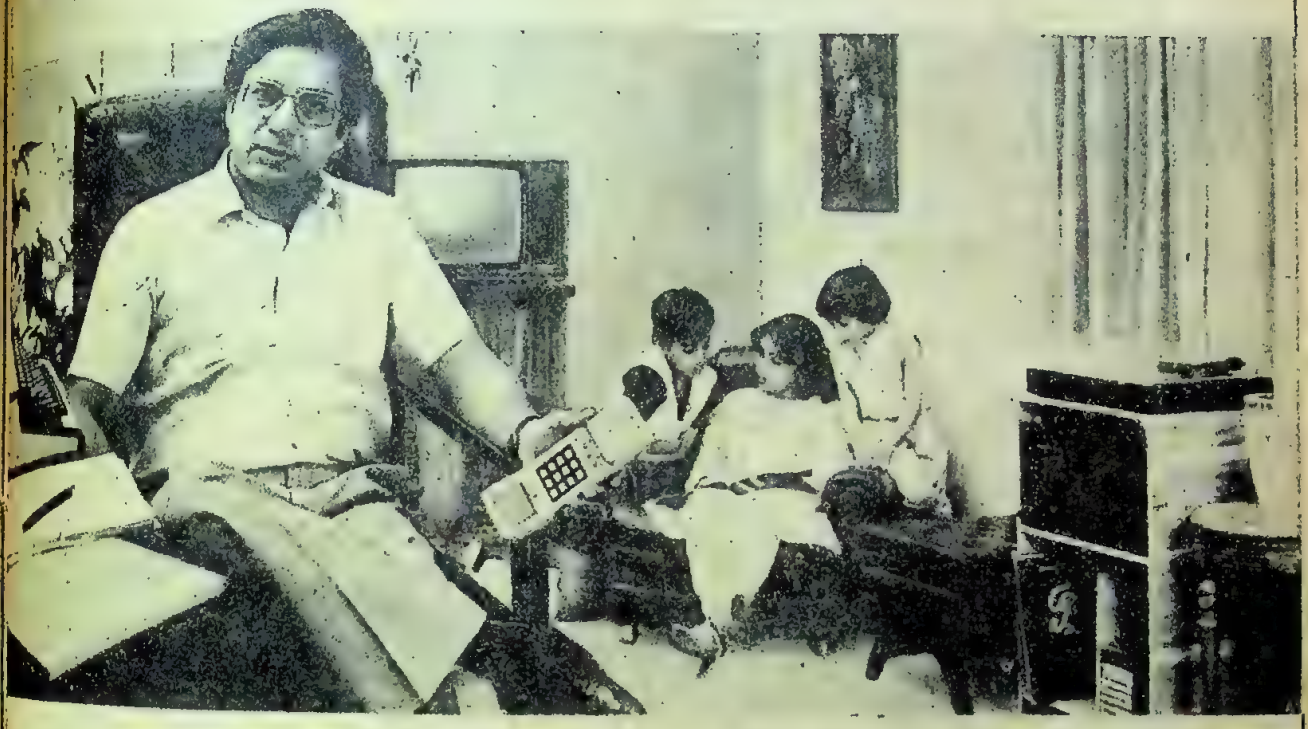
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PUNJAB

A Scarred State

TWO WEEKS, six months or two years from now, such cud-chewers of contemporary history as can command public forums — political leaders, media commentators and even a couple of retired military generals — will still be instructing us on the lessons of Punjab. But the world at large would have forgotten the exact sequence of events, or how and why, in a matter of a couple of years, a dynamic, integrated, prosperous society came so close to a crack-up; and how rapidly it turned militant, partisan and embittered.

In Punjab's cities, the communal feeling has escalated since the days of Operation Bluestar. Whatever remained of a civil or law-enforcing administration has crumbled under army control. And in the countryside, where one bumper crop is to follow another, the presence of the army may prove a double-edged weapon: the longer it lingers, the more fundamentalist could be the face of new Sikh extremism.

Undertaking a random journey through Punjab's towns and cities last summer Correspondent SUNIL SETHI *reported: "Punjab's social fabric is beginning to crumble at the corners (and) the future of Punjab is blowing in the wind. It is beginning to drift towards the dangerous extremities of social disintegration, economic despair and communal insecurity." Last fortnight, he undertook a similar journey through Punjab to find that the simmering tempers of today need no political antidote. His first person report:*

ON THE first day the administration and the army in Amritsar allowed restricted sections of the city's population to enter the Golden Temple, the prescribed crowd of 500 swelled to 5,000. The large mob that collected again that evening was so enormous and the reaction so palpably hostile that the decision-makers quickly withdrew permission for next morning's entry, and retreated to decide on what basis people would be allowed inside in future. Two public relations vans equipped with loudspeakers sped through town during night curfew announcing the fact, their wails stabbing the silence of the warm night like clashing knives.



YOGJOY/THE TRIBUNE

"Depending on which community you listen to, the army are saviours or aggressors, and the storming of the Golden Temple a desecration or a purge."

—Soldiers permitting visitors into the Golden Temple

Earlier that morning, I had encountered some of the hostility enveloping the city like a shroud. Coming out of the Golden Temple among the rush of first visitors was an excitable group of Sikh women, scurrying home after witnessing the devastation inside. I casually asked one of them what she thought about it. Bitterly turning upon me, she snapped: "You should know. It's your raj." Registering the insult aimed directly at a non-Sikh, I retorted: "Not my raj. It's the army's raj."

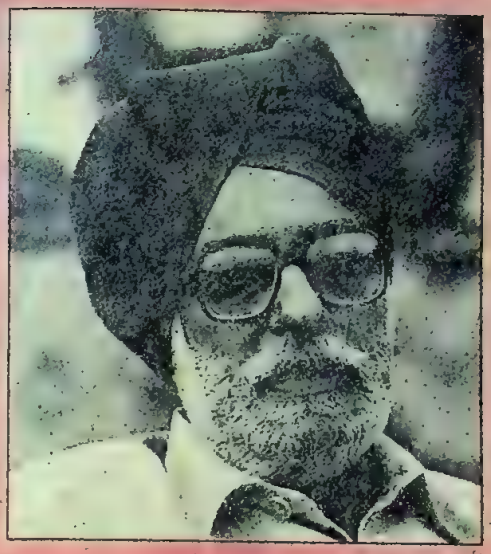
"Well," she shot back even more snidely, "the army belongs to Indira Gandhi and Indira Gandhi belongs to your lot. Go ask her what there is left to see inside." The single most disturbing development in Amritsar after three harrowing years of bloody terrorism and 70 hours of violent army battle to end that reign of terror, is the clear, communal divide between Hindus and Sikhs.

Depending on which community you listen to, all opinion is split straight down the line: the storming of the Golden Temple is either an unholy desecration or a long overdue purge; Bhindranwale is either a great martyr whose name should be sung in prayer or a raving lunatic whose fanatical regime has thankfully ended; the army are saviours in the eyes of Hindus and aggressors among Sikhs; and Mrs Gandhi should either be garlanded for her timely, triumphant action or dismissed for her cowardice in taking so dictatorial a decision.

The festering wounds of communal antagonism seem driven so deep that there seems no immediate meeting ground for rational discussion or logical reassessment. Everyone has become partisan, in a defensive, demeaning way. Awash with rumour and slander, mythmaking and muck-raking, even the prescribed norms of neighbourliness don't seem to exist anymore.

In the shady, suburban lane where my family has lived for over 50 years — a neat row of bungalows owned alternately by Sikh and Hindu members of a solidly responsible bourgeoisie — the community spirit is visibly evaporating. Till sometime last year, it was a bit of a ritual for residents of the lane to take a little stroll after dinner and indulge in routine neighbourly chitchat. Now only one group of residents comes out after dinner, not a single Sikh among them. The dissection of the day's gossip as a result is absolutely bizarre: stories so unbelievable and outrageous that they border on the insane are unchanged.

Perambulating up and down the



"If the army permits free entry into the Golden Temple, every Sikh alive will surge forward. Anything could happen then. And if they don't, how long will they hang around repairing it."

—SARDAR DILBIR SINGH
executive member of Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar



"I took this place (an office near the Golden Temple) a few years ago because I thought it would be such a convenient address. I didn't realise it would so quickly become a curse."

—PRAN MEHRA,
businessman, Amritsar



"The relief is so great as if we've found life after death. The repetition of anti-Hindu sentiments and inflammatory statements was like poison brimming over. It made you want to run away."

—BAWA JOGINDER SINGH,
wholesale trader, Amritsar

lane, a rotund little man who has a shop in the city comes up with salacious tidbits. "You know what the army found when they cleared out the Guru Nanak Niwas after the operation. No less than 200 women, mostly quite young and mostly of very bad character." "Well," says another man trying to be reasonable, "let's be grateful the whole thing is over. Otherwise we wouldn't be here today." Turning to me, he continues, "You know it is a fact that every single house on this street had been earmarked by the Sikhs for takeover after they cleared us out."

Across the lane, opinion gets more equivocal. Sardar Dilbir Singh, a businessman with an amateur interest in politics—he is an executive member of an important Sikh educational trust known as the Chief Khalsa Diwan—has always been against the concept of Khalistan. Last summer when I visited him he was vocal about the endangered sense of Sikh identity and how Bhindranwale, whatever his tactics, was instrumental in reviving some of the spirit of Sikhism. Today he calls Bhindranwale "a truly secular leader", and speaks of the army operation as responsible for savaging the Sikh spirit and reducing their status to that of "second class citizens".

"As things stand," he says, "there is no way out for the Government. If they permit free entry into the Golden Temple, there isn't a Sikh man, woman or child alive who wouldn't surge forward and anything could happen then. And if they don't, then how long will the army hang around repairing it. In the Sikh mind Mrs Gandhi's name has already joined the long list of invaders who plundered the Golden Temple in the past."

About matters closer home, such as the unpleasant restraint now exercised among neighbours, Singh laughs bitterly. "You know what the next door people are saying about me now. They claim they hear strange sounds from my house at night and they suspect that I'm manufacturing arms secretly."

ALL OVER Amritsar city, especially in the labyrinth of interconnected lanes around the Golden Temple which have lain silent through the deadly confrontation, life is slowly reviving. Shops are opening up, traders who have had no business in the past year are putting together the pieces and, as normal travel becomes possible again, the clients from outside are returning. The large bulk of trade in Amritsar being controlled by Hindus, their reaction counts if only as an index of what they hope and expect in the future. On the second floor of a tall, thin building a stone's throw away from the Clock Tower entrance to the Golden Temple, a businessman in nylon thread called Pran Mehra, looks into his office for a few hours a day because "it's better than sitting at home".

"I took this place a few years ago because I thought it would be such a convenient address. I didn't realise it would so quickly become a curse." His neighbour who runs an old family business in machine-made shawls says about 45 days before the army operation: "Bhindranwale's men arrived at my doorstep and demanded to take over the building. They wanted to use the roof as a morcha. I pulled down the shutters that night, locked up and only returned once in a while to collect my mail." Bawa Joginder Singh, yet another wholesale trader in woollen shawls whose shop was looted by an angry mob of Sikhs in late 1982, says the sense of relief "is so great it is as if we've found life after death". More terrifying than the threat of violence and extortion, according to him, were the daily speeches they heard Sikh leaders making on loudspeakers. "The repetitions of anti-Hindu sentiments and inflammatory statements was like poison brimming over. It made you want to run away."

There are other leaders of the business community who fear terrible reprisals against them if the army is withdrawn. Bewildered by the extent of the Sikh reaction, they think it's imperative for the army to stay on and control it effectively if it gets out of hand. "It's a case of being once bitten, twice shy," says Satish Mahajan, whose family has run one of the most important textile mills in the city for the last 32 years. "It's absolutely essential that the people of the city don't burn their fingers again. And this can only happen if there is a massive overhaul in the civil administration. Otherwise chaos will return once the army leaves." Moderate opinion is founded on the belief that time—not political leaders or negotiations—alone can heal the accumulated wounds of both communities.

Terrorists may not have been stamped out altogether but at least its main source of power has been eliminated. "I think the core of the movement has ended," says Ram Labhaya Prabhakar, the general secretary of a trust that manages Amritsar's biggest Hindu temple, the Durgiana Mandir. "At least it's clear that arms won't pile up inside the gurudwara



"We Sikhs will let our homes burn, not our guru's home."

—FOORAN SINGH

panchayat member of village Talwandi Bagherian near Moga explaining why villagers fired unprovoked at the army.

again. This city needs time to let tempers cool. In their minds and hearts, Sikhs may in fact be relieved that the whole terrible ordeal is over, even if they aren't in a position to say so. If Sikhs actually hated Hindus, let me add that the army couldn't have controlled the situation. Communal strife would have broken out. The fact of the matter is that everyone is relieved."

In Jalandhar, Ashwini Minna of the *Hind Samachar* group whose father and grandfather fell to terrorists' bullets cannot cross the street without an escort of four gunmen. "Even now I know one thing," he says, "if the army does not stay for at least six months there will be a thousand Bhindranwales everywhere."

The difference among these reactions is that like some accident victims who, on being unbandaged after a serious injury, want to forget about the whole painful episode, there are others who will dwell upon the details as a warning so that a similar accident can't be repeated.

An extensive army presence can lead to a strange situation. In the towns it may provoke relief among some and resentment among others. But at least its presence is comprehensible, whatever the interpretation. In the villages the story is quite different — not all villagers fully understand why the army is in control. Fed on rumours, they see the army as aggressors and themselves as autonomous defenders of their faith.

Six kilometres out of Moga town, off the main highway is the small village of Talwandi Bagherian, with a population of about 1,000, with a main track leading up to the village gurudwara. On the morning of June 7, as Operation Bluestar was in full swing inside the Golden Temple, there was trouble here. The army version is that as some troops on a routine patrol approached the village, about 12 rounds were fired from within. A jawan was seriously injured and another wounded.

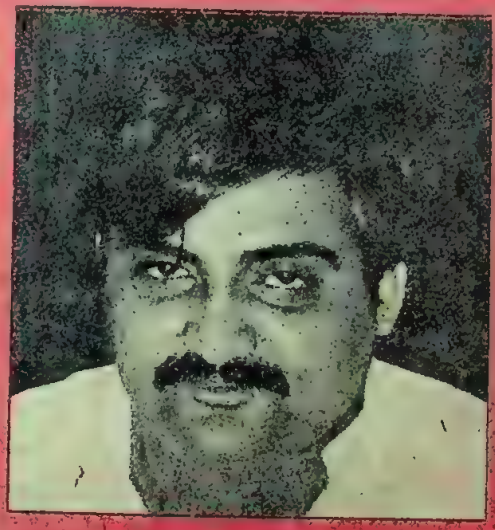
Two weeks after the event, Talwandi Bagherian was still in a state of nervous tension, brought upon partly by shock and partly by mourning. The sarpanch was still under interrogation, said Sukhdev Singh, the secretary of the village cooperative, but yes, we could meet the other members of the panchayat. These turned out to be two elderly men. They led us silently to the house of Jagan Singh who had been killed in the confrontation.

In the dark recesses of the village house, the women were fanning away the heat in the listless heat. On hearing us approach, Jagan Singh's widow began howling and his mother, a withered old



"It is essential that the people of the city don't burn their fingers again. That can only happen if there is a massive overhaul in the administration, or chaos will return once the army leaves."

—SATISH MAHAJAN,
textile mill owner, Amritsar



"After my father's death I knew they would get me. Even now I know one thing: If the army does not stay for at least six months there will be a thousand Bhindranwales sprouting everywhere."

—ASHWINI MINNA
Hind Samachar Group, Jalandhar



"The Government has been vindictive towards Sikhs. On the one hand they've set the army upon us, and on the other they've silenced our voices through censorship."

—SARDAR ATMA SINGH,
acting president SGPC, now jailed

woman, tried to console her and put on her spectacles at the same time. The widow swore there were no weapons in their home; the mother cried bitterly about their destitute future. The women began to wail in unison again, as the panchayat elders led us back to the gurudwara, a ramshackle building under a neem tree. Here the men of the village congregated and in a cacophony of voices began to give exaggerated accounts of the army assault on their village.

But they failed to answer the basic question: what led them to fire on the soldiers? What was the provocation?

One of the old members of the panchayat, Pooran Singh, silenced all the others to answer on behalf of the village. "I will tell you the truth," he said, "Yes, it is true the villagers fired first, the sarpanch and Jagan Singh, whose body they brought back. He fired from right here," —pointing to a small room in the gurudwara courtyard with a bunker-like view of the main approach to the village— "but the truth is that they fired out of confusion. We have no terrorists here, tell me do any of us look like terrorists? For a few days before June 7 we had been hearing rumours about what was happening in Amritsar. Then we heard that the Darbar Sahib was in a shambles. And that other gurudwaras all over Punjab were being attacked. The local boys became very agitated. When we saw the army approach, we thought they had come to take our gurudwara. It was just that and nothing else. Sikhs will let our homes burn, not our guru's home."

In the simple words of a peasant, Pooran Singh had truthfully summed up the feelings of his village. True, lack of reliable information and prevalence of word-of-mouth rumour spreading like wildfire through the villages of Punjab were reasons for one village to shoot unprovoked at the army. But the key to the wise old peasant's words lie in the fear the village felt at the army's approach. And fear when fuelled by anger can become an explosive emotional compound that moves people to act uncontrollably, and no army can extinguish this kind of collective emotion with absolute finality.

TRAVELLING through district Faridkot of Punjab, widely accepted as a hotbed of terrorist activity, one becomes quickly inured to the presence of the army: the sight of a convoy of tanks lumbering on the banks of the Sutlej; the endless army checks on the road; the view of bored soldiers silhouetted against a landscape of last-minute sowing in waterlogged paddy fields. If one is to believe the Government, then these sights are a prelude to normalcy. After all, the farmer has his sowing to return to; and the businessman in the towns is raring to resume his trade; all will soon be the same as before, a picture of peace, harmony, prosperity. But with the benefit of hindsight, one considers how rapidly the peace was shattered and how quickly—in under four years—prosperity had become a relative term in Punjab. Something could as easily snap beneath the surface and snowball into an uncontrollable slide downhill.

Such a sensation is palpable as, 70 km south-west of Moga, one enters a large village called Roda, fast becoming a household word in Punjab. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was born here, his family lives here and the entire village seems to bask in the reflected glory of its somewhat sinister connections. The sun glints like a scimitar in the sky as we trudge past innumerable houses with "Join AISSF" slogans splashed on their walls to the far end of the village.

A spanking white Premier Padmini is parked outside Jarnail Singh's airy brick house; it belongs not to Jarnail Singh's family, nor to people with a mundane mission like ours, but to prosperous townspeople from Moga and Faridkot who have come as pilgrims to the birthplace of a guru they revered. They turn out to be two prosperous-looking, youngish couples. The women speak fluent English in convent school accents. Their husbands are vehemently argumentative and possessed of a religious fervour difficult to reconcile with an urban education.

Together with a small congregation of local people and members of Bhindranwale's family—his brother and niece but not his wife or children—the object of our attention is Bhindranwale's aged father, Jathedar Joginder Singh, a man with a long white beard and furrowing bushy eyebrows. He is in his late 70's now and not a bit surprised why people come from far to see him. He is convinced that his son was possessed of superhuman prowess, both physical and spiritual—rather is, because he believes that Jarnail Singh is not dead, and snapp

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"A place of worship has a special privacy. That has gone because it has been brutally invaded. The sanctity of our gurudwara is gone forever. How can the Government compensate it?"

—An educated woman from Faridkot visiting Bhindranwale's home in Roda

angrily at people who use the past tense for him. In fact, he hardly knew his son and in recent years used to visit him in the Golden Temple like any ordinary follower. Bhindranwale had left his village when he was an adolescent to join an itinerant band of religious preachers led by Sant Gurcharan Singh Bhindranwale and hardly ever returned.

But I had not bargained for the electrifying effect the old man's words would have on the people listening, especially on the visiting businessmen and their wives. Turning around to one of them, I casually asked what he thought reaction among Sikhs was to the army operation. There was a pause before I realised he was choking with sobs. Tears were pouring down his face. He was shaking with a grief so private and sudden that his words were a barely audible sputter: "You don't and can't understand," he said bitterly, "what Sikhs feel like. We are helpless. We cannot react. Incapable."

His wife sitting on the other side of the old man's cot was brushing away her own tears. "I'll tell you," she said, "what it feels like. It feels as if you have been stripped naked and assaulted. Religion, after all, is a very private thing. And a place of worship has a special privacy, call it mystique. That has gone because it has been brutally invaded. The sanctity of our gurudwaras is gone forever. How can the Government ever compensate that?"

No doubt their intense grief was genuine. But from another point of view it seemed indefensible, wholly misplaced. "There was little sanctity left in the Golden Temple," I mumbled, adding something about the reign of terror that gripped Amritsar in the past year.

Both husband and wife were trying to restrain their emotion and appear reasonable. "Mrs Gandhi could have done anything for two long years," said the husband. "Even in the last few months, she could have brought all pressure on Bhindranwale and the men inside. She could have sealed off the Golden Temple, cut off its water and electricity. She could have collected 500 leading Sikhs and led a delegation to the sant. But why did she have to send in the army to that sacred place, blow up the Akal Takht and kill a thousand people."

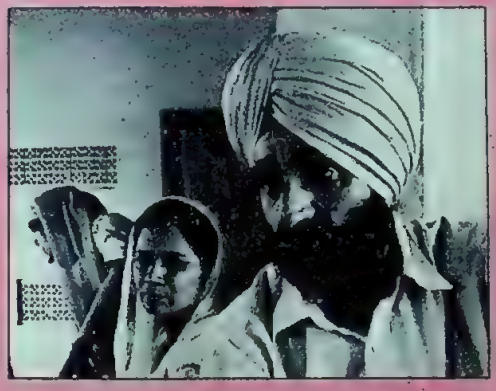
"Don't you see," he added, "her thinking was horribly wrong."

Ditto for this conversation, I thought; but back on the road I couldn't help reflecting that it was easier to leave one aggrieved couple behind rather than an aggrieved and deeply hurt minority of 75 million people.



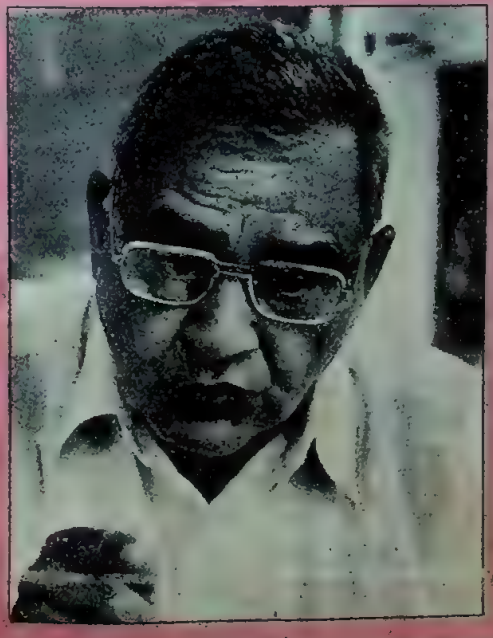
"The rule of those who've devastated the Darbar Sahib will end as bitterly as the rule of Turks and Moghuls, who attacked it in the past. It is God's home and God has his own way of taking revenge."

—JATHEDAR JOGINDER SINGH,
Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's father



"You don't and can't understand what Sikhs feel like. We are helpless. We cannot react, incapable."

GURPAL SINGH
Businessman in Muktsar

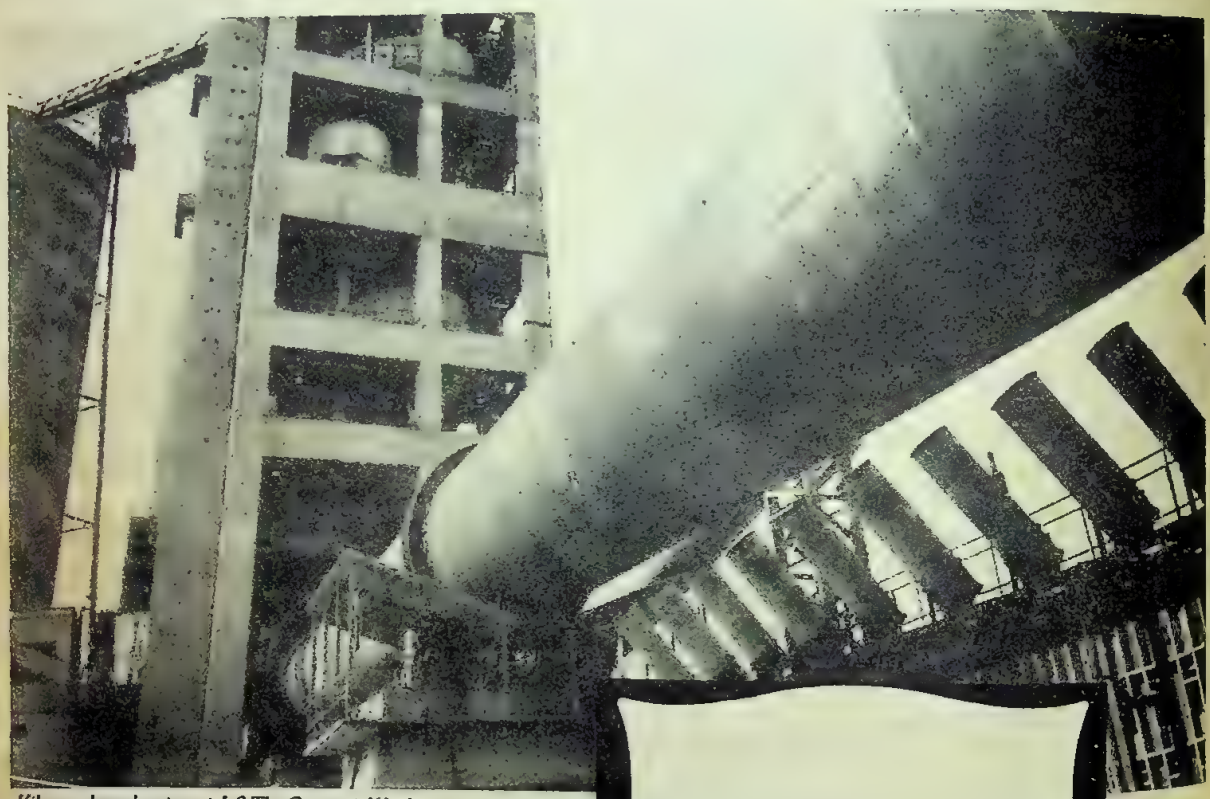


"In their minds and hearts, Sikhs may in fact be relieved that the whole terrible ordeal is over. If Sikhs actually hated Hindus, the army couldn't have controlled the situation. Things had reached such a situation that it was as if the whole town had been hijacked."

—RAM LABHAYA PRABHAKAR
General secretary, Durgiana Mandir Trust, Amritsar

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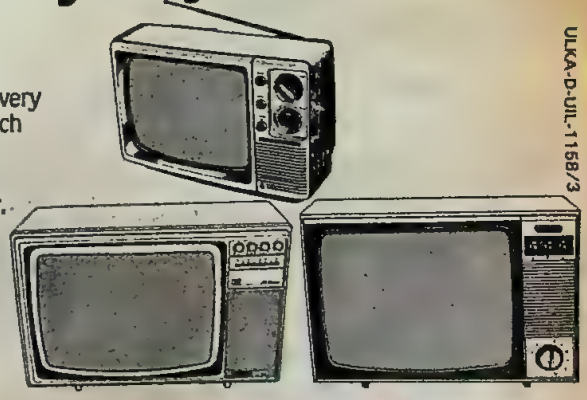


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MADRAS

Venom in the Park

THE SNAKE park of Madras has, over the years, grown into one of the city's most unique and popular tourist spots, and its success largely due to the efforts of one man: Romulus Whitaker. But last fortnight, Whitaker, the founder-director and ex-officio trustee of the park, was in trouble. A.N. Jagannatha Rao, the honorary secretary of the park, complained to the state forest department that Whitaker had been illegally keeping and exporting preserved specimens of dead snakes. In the afternoon of June 7, while Whitaker was away to Kodaikanal on a wildlife assignment, Jagannatha Rao, a state government forest ranger, and another forest official from the Union Government's Wildlife Directorate sealed Whitaker's open office in the snake park. Subsequently, when state forest department officials opened the seal in the presence of both Whitaker and Rao, they found one trunk and two trays of preserved snake specimens.

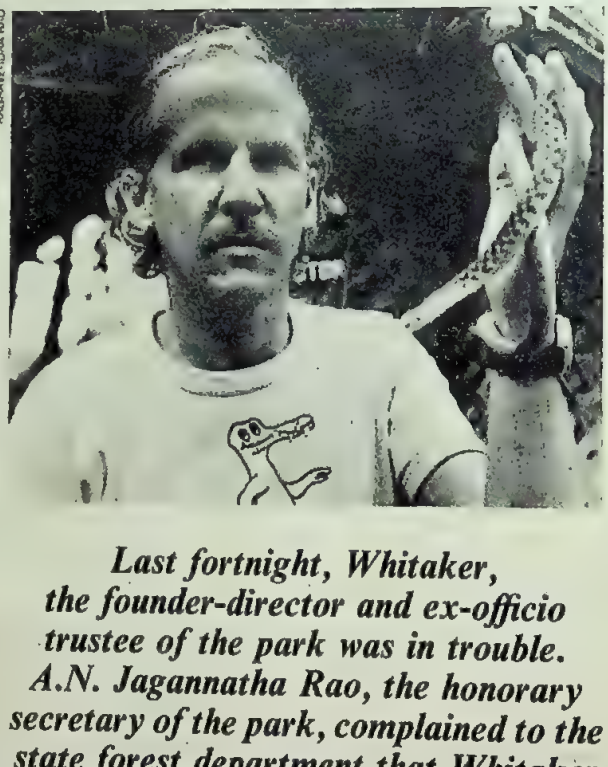
The charge against Whitaker is an extremely serious one. He came to the park a decade-and-a-half ago, not an academically qualified zoologist but a man with a childhood passion for snakes, crocodiles and lizards. With him the park grew—into perhaps the only institute in the country where systematic herpetological research is conducted and Whitaker is today consulted the world over on his experience with reptiles. For him, then, it was an international reputation at stake. Moreover, keeping specimens of dead snakes without a proper permit is a crime under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. How, then, did a trunkload and two trayloads of specimens find their way into Whitaker's office?

Said S. Kondas, chief conservator of forests: "The whole matter is under investigation, and I am not prepared to say anything at this stage." But, observed a top ranking forest department official: "It was improper for Jagannatha Rao to have gone ahead and sealed Whitaker's office on his own. Top police officers and plainclothesmen were just about to be posted outside the snake park to watch if and when the trunk is taken out, when Rao goes and seals the room. I have my own doubts if this kind of evidence will stand in a court of law."

Jagannatha Rao, apparently, had his reasons for doing what he did. On May 10 he received a letter from S.A. Subramani, the forest secretary, giving him permission to capture certain species of reptiles. Said Rao: "That letter came as a bolt from the blue to me. I had never applied for permission to catch any chameleons, tortoises or monitor lizards, all of which Subramani's letter sanctioned." Rao suspects that Whitaker must have made the application in his name.

Whitaker himself has chosen to keep silent on the issue. Said he: "The whole thing is before the Madras High Court. I can only say that I have all the documents to exonerate myself, and I will produce them in court. This application matter is very very interesting and you will see, will come up with astonishing details in court about it." However, according to state and central government sources he did admit to the wildlife warden that some of the specimens found in his room were meant to be supplied to the Delhi National Museum, and some were planted by the Jagannatha Rao group.

The root cause of the current crisis is obviously the growing tension among the trustees of the park. Five of the 11 trustees—Chairman S. Meenakshisundaram, a labour advocate, Honorary Secretary Jagannatha Rao, noted wildlife expert and naturalist M. Krishnan, chartered accountant P.V. Lakshminarayanan, and Dr K. Krishnamurthy—have jointly filed a so-called scheme suit in the high court. The suit seeks the high court's directions to impose on the snake park a draft scheme that these trustees have suggested. Said one of the plaintiff trustees: "When the snake park trust deed was drafted and the park got going in 1972, the whole thing was supposed to be a very informal arrangement, a project involving dedicated herpetologists, wildlife experts, naturalists and conservationists. So we didn't pay much attention to legalities or office procedures. But over these 12 years we found that Whitaker was using the park to project himself and also to make money. We are the people who really brought him up when he was an unemployed, under-matriculate with no one to speak for him except the rats and frogs in his pocket."



RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Last fortnight, Whitaker, the founder-director and ex-officio trustee of the park was in trouble. A.N. Jagannatha Rao, the honorary secretary of the park, complained to the state forest department that Whitaker had been illegally keeping and exporting preserved specimens of dead snakes.

But ever since he did join the park, with only his love for those rats and frogs in his pocket, Whitaker has poured his life and soul into it. The snake park was completely his idea, his effort and creation. After the trust was formed and he took over as director of the park, he was the one out there, day and night, looking after the pythons and cobras and Russels vipers and saw-scaled vipers. Said he: "Where is the question of my making money from the snake park? Any voucher, bill or cheque has to have two signatures for money to be taken out. Two of the three people have to sign—I, Jagannatha Rao and Meenakshisundaram. So, I could not have singly taken out

money." But whether anybody makes any money from the park or not, it certainly has come a long way from the Rs 300 a month days of the early '70s. The park has 50 paise admission tickets now, and its annual revenue from ticket sales is estimated Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh.

Whitaker, on his part, alleges serious administrative and financial irregularities in the management of the park by Chairman Meenakshisundaram and Secretary Jagannatha Rao. Said he: "When I was away in Papua, New Guinea during 1979-80 for almost a couple of years, a semi-permanent cantilever construction was likely came up in the centre of the park to house live snakes. Such constructions are not permitted in reserve forest area, and what was worse, the contract for all the construction work went to Jagannatha Rao's own companies. More recently, in mid-1983, I had gone to east Malaysia for a couple of months. When I got back, I discovered a serious discrepancy of a few thousand rupees in one month's ticket sales alone. I brought it to the attention of the trustees, but the matter Dhandayudapani, who was responsible, was coolly let off the hook by permitting him to resign."

It was the Dhandayudapani affair which brought the cold war in the snake park to a boil. Whitaker demanded an investigation into the accounts of the previous five years. Around this time, coincidentally, an election to the vacant post of a trustee came up. The election of the seventh trustee was crucial because on it hinged the fate of Whitaker's demand for an investigation since five trustees were already ranged against him. But the election, held on August 17, 1983, was topped wildlife man E.R.C. Davidar was supported by Whitaker and the three government trustees. Said one of them: "First the anti-Whitaker trustees stalled the meeting, so we were forced to formally consult the Government on whether we could vote."

While Whitaker is going to contest the latest round of charges in court, he is clearly becoming cynical. Said he: "I am going up now. Once I clear myself of all the charges levelled against me, I want to quit the snake park." But if Whitaker is sad, there are some of the frequent visitors to the snake park. Said one: "If many of us are now convinced that all snakes are not harmful, the credit must wholly go to Whitaker and his snake park." Obviously, the latest mud slinging reveals that there are more snakes in the park than are officially recorded.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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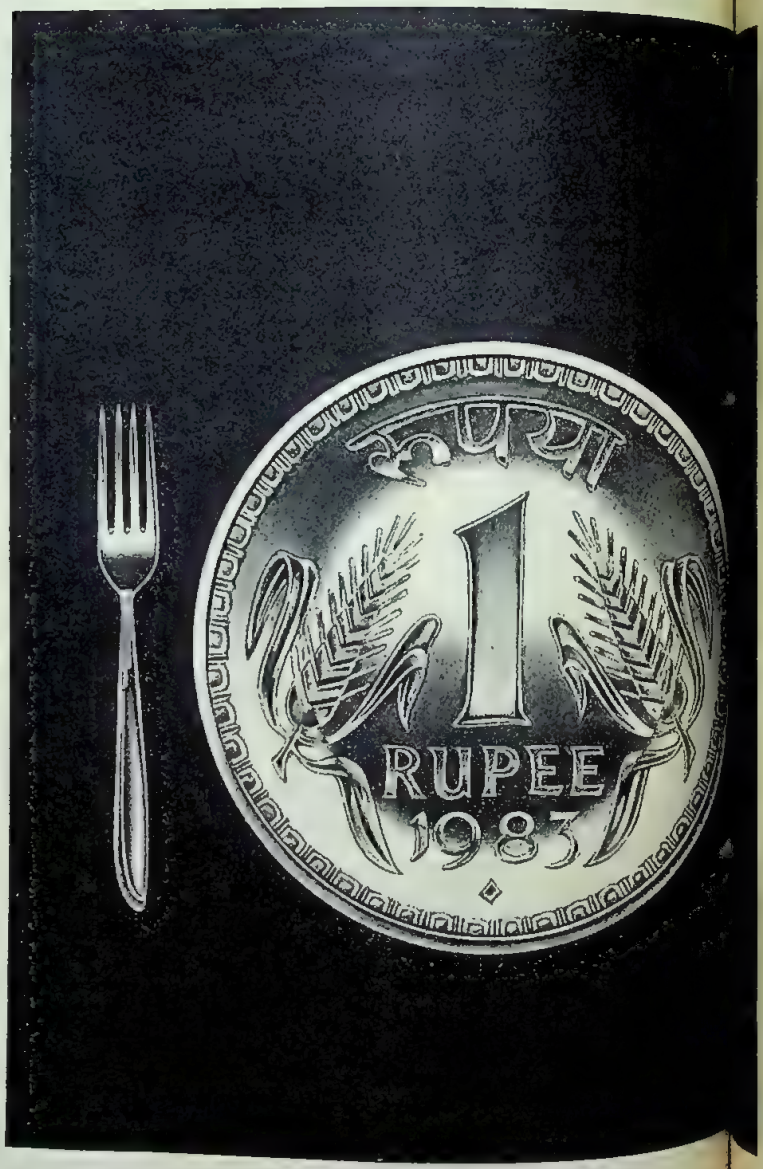
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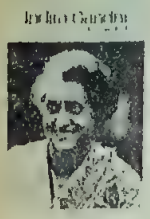
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The Gospel According to Paul

INDIRA GANDHI
by SWRAJ PAUL
The Heron Press
Pages: 128; Price: £7.95



THE MAN's versatility never ceases to amaze. That cartoonists' delight of a face is capable of wearing a bewildering succession of masks, each more intriguing than the other. Swraj Paul, the scourge of the Indian private sector, is also the Marcel Marceau of the corporate stage. One minute, the expansive and highly successful tycoon oozing bonhomie and benevolence. The next, the sabre-toothed shark swallowing unwary victims without a blink of his bulging eye. Then there is the political gadfly hovering tantalisingly above the centres of power in at least two major world capitals. In between are flashes of the rustic Punjabi roots of a man who can be equally at home consuming caviar in 10 Downing Street or wolfing *sarson ka sag* at a roadside dhaba.

And now, enter stage left, Swraj Paul the author, though there are many who would no doubt question the validity of that claim. Paul's plunge into the publishing pool is hardly the result of being inspired by some hitherto-invisible muse. It is, as the title suggests, an unabashed plug for his favourite person, Mrs Gandhi, prime minister of India, and in Paul's own words (if they are indeed his), "the best hope for all our tomorrows".

Somehow, a book on this well-worn subject had a tryst with Paul's destiny. It is at once recognisable as the humble tribute of a grateful supplicant, a debt that had perforce to be paid. Paul is not just your run-of-the-mill Gandhi-lover. His is the fanatical devotion of the true believer. To his eternal credit, Paul makes no bones about the fact that it is a personal offering to his private deity. In fact, it is not very difficult to picture Paul in Portland Place strewing marigolds and lighting incense sticks below a portrait of Indira Gandhi. It is precisely for that reason that a book of this kind can have little literary or historical value and neither is it intended as such. Paul has the wherewithal and the courage of his conviction to ignore the priorities, literary or financial, that genuine authors are saddled with. Nonetheless, this is also not an outpouring of sycophantic drivel dictated at high speed to an electronic stenographer. This book has been fashioned with care, thought and, surprisingly, taste.

It is almost certainly ghost written. The language is far too slick and sophisticated to tally with Paul's earthy and somewhat limited vocabulary. This is perhaps why the reading of Paul's book ends with an uncontrollable desire to know who really wrote the book. There is considerable talent in the anonymous crafter. The sentiments are undoubtedly Paul's but the final result is a polished piece of prose in which the one-sidedness of the theme is cleverly camouflaged as a cross between a semi-biography and a history primer for middle school students. In London, at an impressive ceremony to launch the book, Paul admitted: "I am no author, just a simple businessman. This book was an effort on the part of one ordinary person to write about his experiences of one of the most extraordinary personalities of the century".

The book is segmented into carefully-selected mosaics that make up the undoubtedly fascinating life of one of the world's longest-reigning leaders. It is as if Mrs Gandhi's life history was fed into a third generation computer programmed to pick out the positive elements and gloss over the ones that are not. The actual wordage is mercifully brief, more than half the book devoted to photographs that are as carefully chosen for their flattery of the subject matter and to support the sympathetic text, including, inevitably, shots of the Paul family grinning broadly in the background of the Gandhi entourage abroad.

But yet, there is perhaps an element of truth in the words of Paul's friend and British MP Eldon Griffiths who writes in the foreword: "It (the book) does not set out to be a critical biography. It makes no pretence to political sophistication or scholarly objectivity. It is what it is; an attempt by a conscientious and immensely hardworking overseas Indian businessman to convey to the world his feelings for a woman and, indeed, for a prime minister, on whose behalf he would gladly put his right hand into the fire."

In that context, the book perhaps reveals more about Paul than it does about the subject itself. It does, to some extent, reveal why people like Paul, enormously successful and secure, should go out of their way to play handmaiden, acolyte and drumbeater to one of the most complex personalities of our times. Paul starts with his first contact with Mrs Gandhi in 1967 when he had moved to London with his wife in the hope of finding effective treatment for his youngest daughter Ambika, a leukaemia victim. Frustrated by the Indian Government's delay in permitting his other three children to join their parents in London, Paul writes to Mrs Gandhi and suddenly experiences the Open Sesame magic of the name. Within days, the Paul family is reunited and "an obscure resident of London" is converted to the faith. Ambika, tragically, dies but instead is born an endearing if long-distance relationship that has led, finally, to the publication of this book.

But if Paul's everlasting image of Indira Gandhi is coloured for ever by the impressionistic appeal of that first indirect contact, it is coloured well as far as the book is concerned. Paul engages for the rest of the book in a spirited defence of the prime minister that, for all its bias, still has a strong emotional appeal. Written in the first person, it is as much his long-range judgement of events involving Mrs Gandhi as it is a faithful parroting of her own oft-repeated and strident defence for various actions. It is, however, that effect—of a concerned Indian patriot living abroad and watching with growing horror the degeneration of his beloved land—that lends itself to the effectiveness of the writing.

PAUL'S portrayal of the Opposition as a bunch of carnivorous jackals surrounding the defenceless Indira Gandhi, belongs to the fairy-tale genre. His defence of the Emergency and Sanjay Gandhi's sterilisation programme is a faithful echo of what Mrs Gandhi has herself repeatedly expressed on those questions. It is here that Paul (or his ghost writer) has come into his own. The chapter on the events leading to the Emergency and her subsequent years in the wilderness is the longest in the book. And his defence of Mrs Gandhi is cleverly contrived. He quotes extensively from letters she had written at that time to people like Bruno Kreisky, chancellor of Austria, and to Eldon Griffiths explaining her predicament in highly sympathetic terms and the harassment and witch-hunting she and her family were being subjected to. There are also letters written



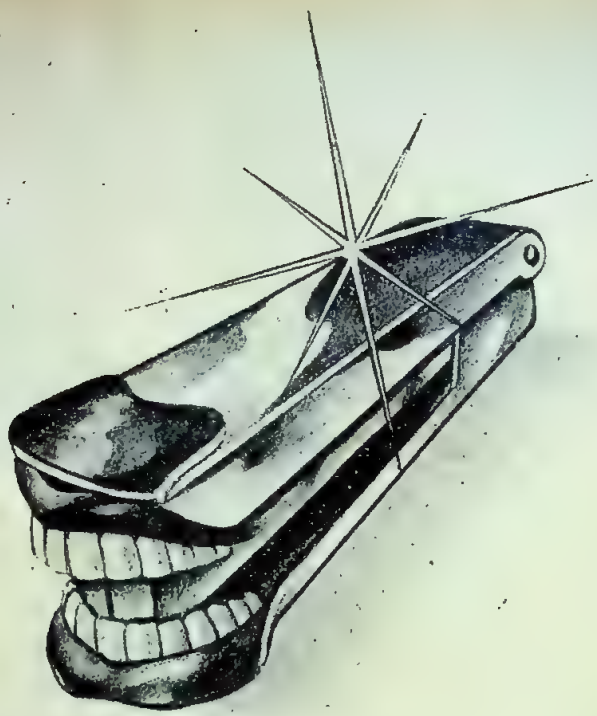
The author and his wife flank Mrs Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher and Tory MP Eldon Griffiths: well-connected

Paul himself all of which show Mrs Gandhi as an unselfish paragon of virtue, concerned only with the unity of the country and the fate of the toiling masses, unmindful of any personal or political price she may suffer in the bargain. For the most part that kind of contrived treatment cuts little ice but interspersed as it is with Paul's earthy, somewhat naive kitchen philosophy, it does make for an effective public relations effort.

There is little doubt that Number 1 Safdarjung Road played no mean part in helping with the final appearance and construction of the book. Where else could Paul have had access to private letters written by Mrs Gandhi to leaders like Nehru, or for that matter, to some of the photographs that could only come from the Gandhi family album. Apart from that there are few revelations that one could expect from a book written by a prominent member of the chosen few privileged to be as close to Mrs Gandhi as Paul is. He does confirm one fact that has so far been classified as rumour, namely that he was offered the post of Indian ambassador to London after Mrs Gandhi's return to power in 1980. Paul also takes the credit for having suggested to Mrs Gandhi that she should take up the leadership of the Non-aligned Movement.

Ironically enough, the chapter that Indian readers will find most interesting has very little to do with Mrs Gandhi (though Escorts and DCM might disagree), and that is his second favourite subject; the need to clean up Indian business. He says nothing that he has not said before except that it is presented as part of Swraj Paul's four-point programme for preserving the unity of the country. The four problem areas as defined in the Gospel by Paul are: the explosion of the cities; the poverty of the rural areas; the cleaning up of Indian business; and the need for honesty in politics. Paul's panaceas are predictable, and practical at least in theory if not in practice. But again it is diluted by his uncontrollable itch to project Mrs Gandhi as the sole saviour of a nation in dire peril, whether it is harnessing the rivers, the need to plant more trees or making rural India a more attractive proposition for the hordes streaming to the urban centres from the countryside.

Thus, the overall theme of the book is crystal clear: Mrs Gandhi is the only person capable of holding this vast country together, the rock-solid bulwark between democracy and anarchy. At £7.95 (Rs 125) that might sound like a pretty expensive Congress (I) election poster, but for a man who can squander Rs 13 crore to prove a personal, and debatable, corporate point, it is a cheap price to pay for putting his admiration for Mrs Gandhi down on glossy art paper. —DILIP BOBB



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Three who made the grade: (from left) P.T Usha, Valsama and Major Vij

OLYMPIC SELECTIONS

The Obstacle Race

ON MOST evenings, at the sprawling Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium for the last few weeks, champion high jumper Nallaswami Annavi could be seen practising his leaps with a dedication and an enthusiasm that left few untouched. Last fortnight, however, Annavi was moodily kicking a volleyball to sprinter Adile Sumariwala, all thought of practice forgotten in the gloom that enveloped most of the athletes at the stadium on July 9. The reason: the contingent for the 1984 Olympic Games at Los Angeles had just been announced and Annavi and Sumariwala were conspicuous by their absence, as were five other athletes who were thought to be as good as selected for the world's most spectacular sporting event. Said a very clearly disappointed Annavi tersely: "I wish I could go and I still haven't given up hope."

From official explanations of the criteria for selection, it is clear why Annavi will not be going to Los Angeles. The Government appears to have taken a precise accountant's attitude to the job: the qualifying marks were the eighth and the tenth position at the Montreal Olympics for men and women respectively—after eliminating performances by eastern bloc sportsmen. Moscow was earlier the norm but the authorities soon abandoned it; as air vice-marshal C.L. Mehta (retd), secretary general, IOA, says: "If we had taken Moscow as our benchmark then, with the elimination policy we have been following, both the western bloc—which did not come there—and the eastern bloc—which will not come to Los Angeles—would have had to be discounted. What do you have left?"

But even the norms laid down with Montreal as the base appear to have played havoc. The department has actually stayed with the rules and this is precisely what is causing such heartburn among officials. For instance, the Amateur Athletics Federation of India (AAFI) had in the first flush of optimism sent 15 names for consideration, which officials claim were put together very carefully after eliminating anybody who was even remotely suspected of being an average performer. The list contains, besides Annavi and Sumariwala, such stalwarts as Suresh Yadav, who gave India a bronze in the 1982 Asiad and a gold in the Kuwait Asian Athletics Championship in 1983 in the 1,500 metres. Another bright prospect listed was Ajmer Singh, national record holder in the discus throw.

But their hopes were dashed when the selection criteria came in the way. Says Mehta: "I can say with a clear mind that the rules have been stuck to with the utmost firmness." Admittedly, some of the sportsmen stand nowhere in the international line-up, even without the eastern bloc. There are at least 25 jumpers who leap higher than Annavi, at least a dozen who throw the discus farther than Ajmer Singh, and a score who run the 5,000 metres faster than Rajkumar. But a babu-like attitude is not made for encouraging promising sportsmen. China, for instance, is sending a huge contingent to the games. And, four years ago, a teenager called P.T. Usha, then all of 16, was sent to Moscow, finished an invisible seventh in her heat, but came back to become India's most glittering prospect in 1984. A coach says bitterly: "We talk of encouragement. But keeping a shotputter like Balwinder Singh, who holds the national record, away from Los Angeles, is this encouragement?"

The fact that the same criteria were applied with blind rigidity to all sports made for some glaring anomalies. There are nine shooters in the list but shooting, to put it mildly, is not a sport where Indians figure prominently on the world or even the Asian stage: at the last Asiad, the shooters brought in only two medals. That is a less than modest tally when compared to the 21-medal haul of the athletes—including four gold—but the number of athletes chosen is only eight.

Even then, one of the best shooters







Sheet hopeful Sandhu, (extreme right) high jumper Annavi and shotputter Balwinder Singh

...ghest artiste Harsimran Singh Sandhu—the son of manager Daya Singh Sandhu ...almost didn't go. The IOA virtually ...tied itself into knots trying to get him in, ...insisting that the base be taken as the Jakarta Asian Shooting Championships and the Edmonton Shooting Championships. This reportedly cut little ice with the powers that be but Sandhu, who shot an impressive 191 at the selection trials held at Delhi's Tughlaqabad ranges, made it at the last minute.

SOURCES at the ministry say that the controversies that have dogged this particular contingent stampeded the selectors into a kind of stagnant position. First, there was the chaos at the shooting trials, which had to be held again and again, with a video camera in attendance, first in a corridor—of all places—at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium and then at another stadium. Then came the shooting match between the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) and the IOA, when the NRAI, which found itself out in the cold, instituted legal action over selection procedures.

But the most embarrassing incident was Olympian Milkha Singh's walk-out from the athletics selection committee over the selection of the coach and manager of the athletics squad. He says that "there was a lot of manipulation" and charges that the meeting in Delhi was called hurriedly. "Our contention was that either a former Olympian or well-known coach who has produced some stars should go," explains Milkha. When V.K. Verma and S. Saini were chosen as manager and coach respectively, Milkha walked out.

There is no indication that the controversies have been laid to rest. In fact, as the sportsmen prepared for the flight to Los Angeles, increasingly loud grumblings were beginning to be heard in the ranks over the allowances. Each person receives $35 (Rs 385) per day towards board and lodging at the Olympic Village, plus $7 (Rs 77) as daily pocket money. The protest starts with the $7 allowance—down from the $10 (Rs 110) promised earlier—which one competitor dismisses contemptuously "just enough to buy two Budweisers". As another official puts it: "This allowance is not just petty, it is downright embarrassing."

That, however, is not all. Scandalously, each participant, player and official, has to personally arrange for rupees to buy the dollars. The Government pays only the return fare to Los Angeles and the sportsmen have to persuade their respective state associations to give them the money, nearly Rs 12,500 worth of dollars for each person for 27 days in America. Last fortnight, in fact, one of the officials who had just learnt that he had been cleared was gloomily contemplating a piece of paper where an IOA official had thoughtfully jotted down the price-tag: "$35 for 27 days; $7 for 27 days; Rs 1,200 for kit; Rs 100 for airport tax." The official was getting ready to dash to his home state to arrange the money—and scrounge around for a few more extra dollars. The Government, mercifully, arranges the foreign exchange clearance, but only for the amounts stipulated.

Unfortunately for some of the sportsmen, the national associations which are supposed to grant them the money are at loggerheads with the IOA and are not likely to look kindly on the not so modest request. There are small mercies, though: a prominent footwear manufacturer has promised complete kits, including track suit and shoes, for each of the sportsmen. A leading textile manufacturer which was stitching the uniform was reportedly being persuaded to give them free. And for the athletes, at least, some of the pecuniary pressure will be eased because the AAFI is giving them an additional $10 as daily allowance.

The money problems aside, officials were still optimistic that they could get the authorities to unbend over the choice of sportsmen. Said one: "All is not lost. We will try until the very last minute." But that last minute is not very far away—the entire contingent is booked for a July 18 flight and efforts are being made to fly them out July 15—and with the Government in a recalcitrant mood the list could stay unchanged. For Annavi, who electrified India barely two months ago with a record-breaking leap, and for others rejected by the calculator, Los Angeles will remain a distant dream.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI



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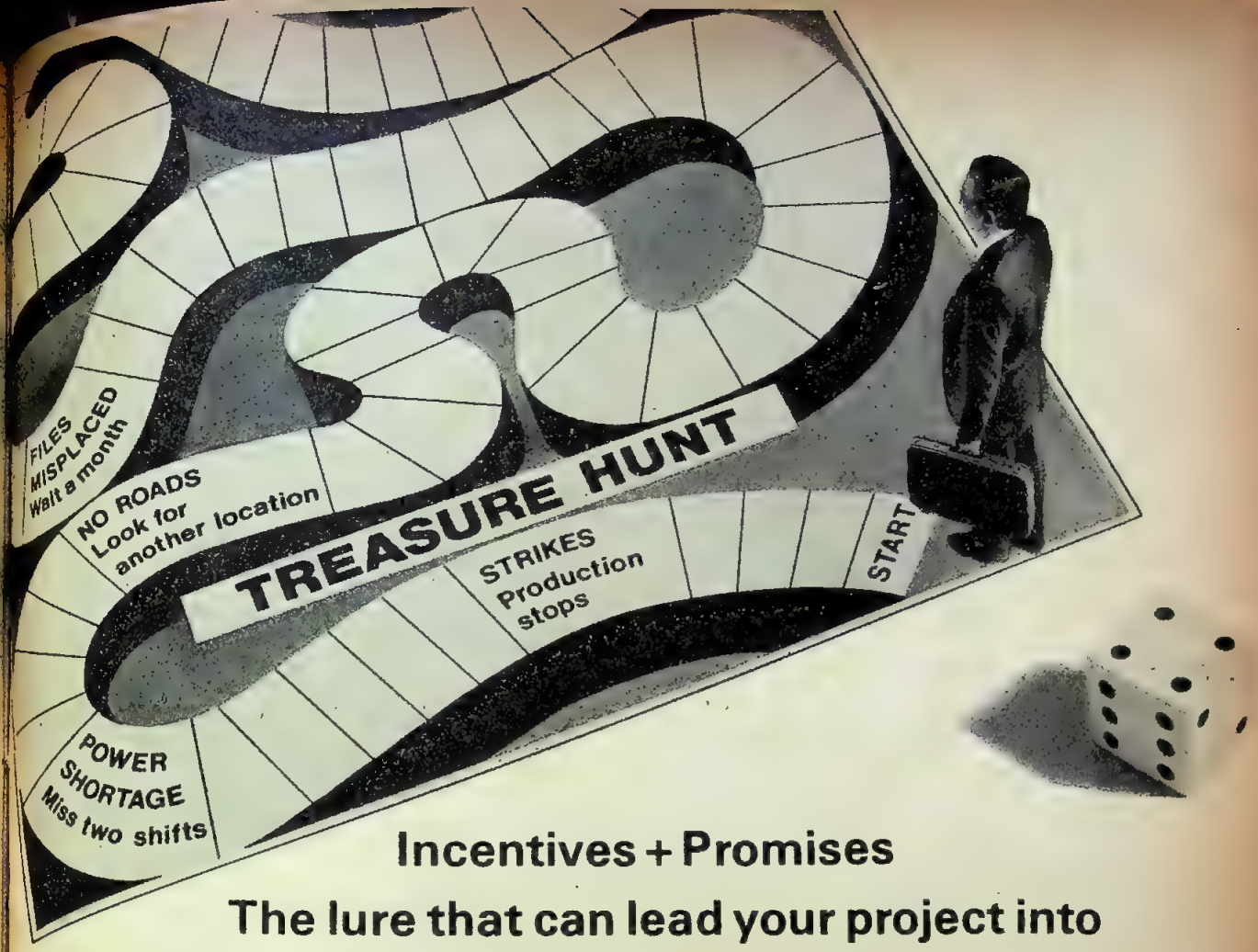
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YACHTING

Shortened Sails

THERE were few surprises at the national yachting championships held at Hyderabad's Hussain Sagar lake last fortnight. M.S. Pillai, 29, of the Corps of Engineers Sailing Club carried away the Katari Bowl for the OK Dinghy nationals—as he has five times before in the nine years of the nationals. And this year's runner-up was no dark horse, either: C.S. Pradipak of Hyderabad had bagged the championship on the remaining three occasions. Indeed, if there was any surprise at all, it was the number of entries that poured in for the championships. Seventeen of the 52 entries for the Enterprise championship at Pune, eight out of 26 for the OK Dinghy contest, and four of the 20 for the Optimist class of yacht had to be turned away simply because there were not enough boats to go around.

Yachting has become a big draw, with the number of enthusiasts rising to nearly 1,000 today from a modest 200 less than a decade ago. But the country's 26 sailing clubs face a perplexing problem: the popularity of the sport has not been matched with a corresponding growth of equipment. The principal craft, the single-handler OK Dinghy, the Optimist and the double-handler 470 are in desperately short supply. Since not every yachtsman has a boat of his own, this meant that in the recent championships the boats available had to be pooled together and rotated among sailors in groups of three to ensure that no one sailed the same boat twice. Explained Brigadier Bobby Putta, secretary of the National OK Dinghy Association: "For racing success, the sailor and the boat must feel absolutely at one. Those using their own boats have an inherent advantage."

Those who had their own boats were naturally enough, not enthusiastic about this rather complicated process of grouping and matching through computers. Argued Pradipak: "This so-called socialism in sailing is at the cost of quality. For better performance, the boats should be tuned for both durability and suitability to individual sailing techniques." But M.P. Jaggi, who organised this year's OK Dinghy championship had a point. He said: "The pooling of boats is handicap, but the purpose of the exercise of matching boats is to reduce the lag between the best and the rest." He added philosophically: "This is the price we have to pay if water sports are to become popular."

Another handicap for the sport is the stagnant yacht building industry. Enterprising groups like the EME Sailing Club, Secunderabad, make a handful of boats. But a Coimbatore firm has what is almost a monopoly on the supply of equipment, that unfortunately does not always stand up to the rigours of international competition. Cost is a dampener, too. According to Jaggi, the Optimist for juniors can be made for Rs 4,000, but boats of other classes cost more than Rs 10,000. "Maintenance is equally expensive, and few sailors can afford their own yachts," he adds.

Those who make it despite all odds are sent abroad for training. For instance, the Committee for Olympics Preparation in Yachting (COPY) sent Lt Farokh Tarapore abroad for training this year before he joins the Indian contingent at Los Angeles for the Olympics. Tarapore, who is considered to be the most promising sailor of the decade, had little choice. There are just two boats of the Olympics class—470—in the country, and both belong to the navy.

Tarapore's training and participation in the Olympics is considered a valuable investment. Says Dutta: "Champion sailors are not made in a day. But Tarapore's experience with the 470 at the Olympics will make medal prospects for the future brighter." Indian yachtsmen have participated twice in the Olympics and their experience there helped them do well in the Asian circuit. Says Pillai: "Better technology and expertise puts Japan on the top in Asia. We can challenge them with more pre-contest practice."

Inevitably, the services have dominated the sport. Sailing is encouraged by the army, and "watermanship", as the army engineers call it, is popular. The Corps of Engineers has a large fleet in Pune, and its sailing club is planning to buy a yacht in England next month. A six-man team is scheduled to sail around the world in 15 months. "The expedition is to tell enthusiasts that sailing is an arduous but enduring fun sport," says Pillai enthusiastically. The navy, predictably, has an equally soft spot for the sport. Many of its ships have one or two yachts attached to them, and the chief of naval staff is the ex-officio president of the Yachting Association of India.

Meanwhile, the Yachting Association of India is gearing up for the Asian championships next year and the Seoul Asian Games in 1986. India will enter the 470, Enterprise, Laser, Windglider and Optimist classes in both championships. At the moment there are no Lasers in the country, but the navy plans to buy two of these single-handler boats. The winners of this year's OK Dinghy championships will train on them from January onwards. While India has the right men, if it is to get anywhere in international yachting, it certainly must get the right equipment as well.

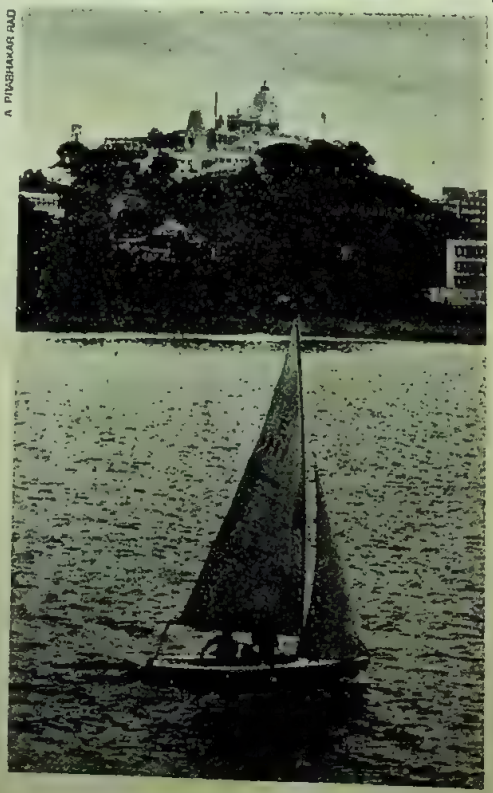
—AMARNATH K. MENON

Enterprise class race at Hyderabad; Tarapore (below left) and Pillai





A PIXBHAKAR RAO



The world really consists of two kinds of people: those who enjoy a lobster and those who don't.

Napoleon and Dali were two of those who did. Napoleon exercised his Imperial prerogative to name the lobster recipe specially created for him in the Thermidor month of the French Revolutionary calendar (July 19 to August 17). The dish? Lobster Thermidor, naturally.

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The procedure involves scooping the boiled lobster meat out of the shell, combining it with a sauce to which cream, mushrooms and wine have been added, filling the shells with the mixture, garnishing them with grated cheese and then broiling them for a few minutes.

The secret of making a good sauce for the Thermidor lies in cooking the flour well without browning it. Lobster aficionados often bitingly remark that too much cheese overwhelms the subtle flavour of the lobster.

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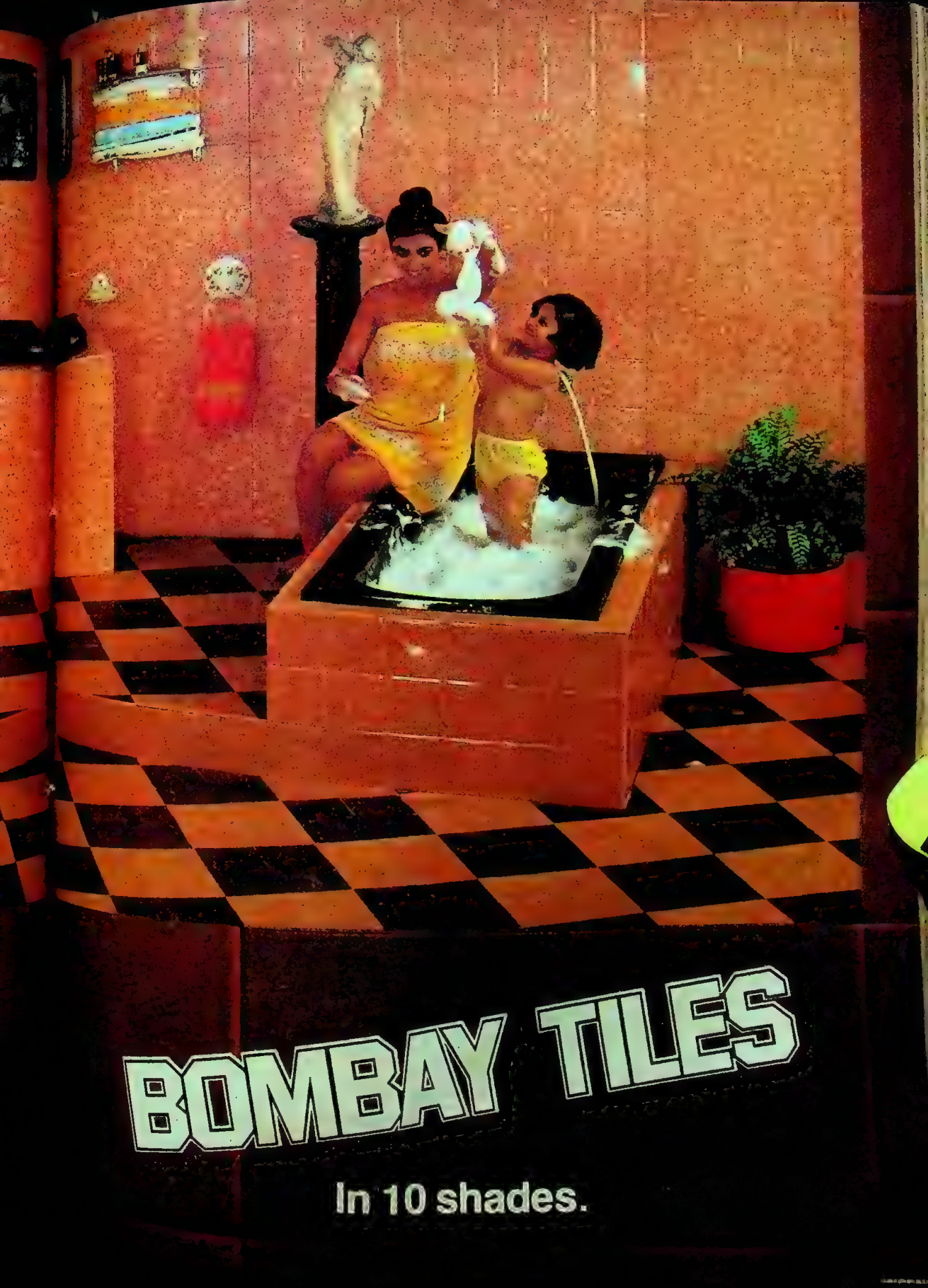


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GRAULI

The Pollution Peril

THE RIHAND reservoir bordering eastern Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur district and neighbouring Madhya desh's Sidhi district, is the country's gest man-made lake, over 50 km long w years ago, the wooded hillsides ound Rihand had virtually no roads, the local villages no electricity. But that is changing. Giant power stations coming up around the lake: enough, ually, to generate a mammoth 0 mw of electricity. Coal production the area, less than 6 mil- tonnes in 1980-81, is expec- to increase to 30 million nes in the next 15 years, and eventually at 75 million nes—more than half the annual production in the ntry last year. The Rihand ion is therefore slated to come the country's energy ca- And in the local town of grauli, a striking blue slogan a white-washed wall says it "Careful! The times are nging."

But grand-scale change gs grand-scale problems. the rapid change in Singr- could spell major environmental da- e. Already, 70 million cubic metres of h overburden has accumulated in man-made mountains because of the to expose coal seams. And environ- alists warn that much of this will get ed down into the Rihand reservoir ng the rains.

The generation of electricity brings own environmental hazards. For gh the power stations have installed ly efficient equipment to collect 99 cent of the ash that would otherwise of the chimneys, the problem is far solved. The ash is mixed with water orm a slurry that is pumped to spe- y created ash dumps at the edge of the rvoir. The 1000 mw Singrauli power on alone discharges 2,500 tonnes of per day. This will more than double to illion tonnes annually as capacity bles—and there are going to be eight giant power stations in the region. again, warn environmentalists, e is the danger that the ash will either into the lake, or having dried, will in swirls of dust during the dry bands and get into people's lungs.

There is a third potential problem: the local population is expected to be between 5 lakh and a million in another 15 years, making it among the 50 biggest cities in the land. Planners warn that this population growth in one concentrated urban setting could result in a chaotic habitat. Says Harsh Mander, chief executive officer of the Singrauli Special Area Development Authority (SADA): "The pace of change in the area is so rapid that we must be prepared well in advance."



SRILI KANT KHANDEKAR

Ash slurry discharged into the reservoir

On all three problems, there are some initiatives being taken to contain the damage: two teams of experts have gone into the question of how to minimise pollution from the coal overburden. Madhya Pradesh has created SADA to take care of urban planning in order to handle the expected population explosion, and the power station managers argue that the ash problem has been solved with the installing of electrostatic precipitators and the creation of ash dumps by dyking off a part of the lake. There is little doubt that there is much greater awareness of environmental dangers now than a few years ago, when a local chemical company used to dump untreated effluents into the lake.

However, K.C. Mathur of Rewa's Awadesh Pratap University, who is also secretary of the rural division of the Environmental Planning and Coordination Organisation of Madhya Pradesh says that "in spite of the dyke the main body of the reservoir is bound to be affected by ash slurry seepage from the dump. And leeching will introduce ash into the underground water, thus affecting wells also". He adds that ash from the dump is bound to fly in the dry months, and the suspended particles could well lead to bronchitis and skin diseases.

But S.K. Dasgupta, deputy general manager at the power station, says that in England ash dumps have been converted into regular farmland. And M.L. Malik, general manager of the Singrauli plant, argued stoutly that the dyke wall is built along the same lines as the Hirakud dam. "If there is no seepage from that dam, how can ash seep from our dump into the lake?" he asks. But the Delhi-based Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) has reportedly pointed out that wet lands and lakes are the last place at which ash should be dumped.

The progress on urban planning is dismal. While Madhya Pradesh has created SADA to handle urbanisation, Uttar Pradesh has yet to set up any similar body. Even SADA, far from preparing the ground for a township that is expected to be 12 km long and 4 km wide, has not yet got the Rs 15 crore required to acquire land.

Meanwhile, the urban sprawl will cut across the inter-state boundary and for all practical purpose be a large single town. But while an official coordination committee, a planning coordination committee and an inter-state committee have been formed, their activities have been on a low key, and development on either side of the boundary carries on independently of each other. In fact, the initial period saw the TCPO working on one master plan, and similar work being done by Madhya Pradesh's Town and Country Planning Department as well as by Bombay-based architect Charles Correa. None of the three plans tallied.

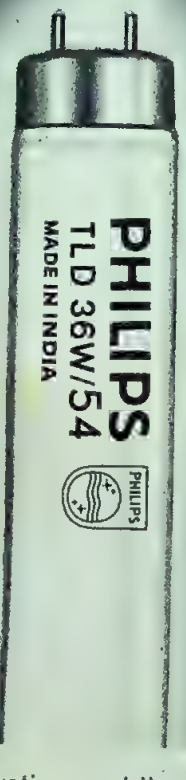
Even now, while it is agreed that the township must be integrated, the different organisations involved are going their own way. Both the National Thermal Power Corporation, which is setting up the power stations, as well as Central Coalfields have set up their exclusive townships for employees, and there is a general indifference to the fate of the local population. Already, slums and shanty structures have started appearing on the township fringe in haphazard fashion, and these can only grow unless urban planning is quickly taken in hand.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Singrauli

PHILIPS

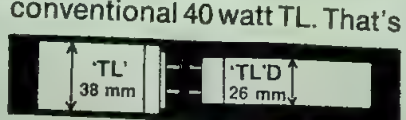


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STATEMENT BY SHRI J.N. BISWAS, CHAIRMAN, UNITED INDUSTRIAL BANK LTD. AT THE FORTY-FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BANK, HELD IN CALCUTTA ON JUNE 22, 1984



Friends,

It gives me much pleasure in welcoming you all to the 44th Annual General Meeting of the Bank.

I am glad to report that we have been able to attain all round progress in the bank.

During the year under review our deposits have increased by 19.4% as compared to 16.2% average growth rate attained by all scheduled commercial banks. Deposits of the bank rose to Rs. 141.57 crores from Rs. 118.56 crores in the previous year recording an increase of Rs 23.01 crores. This amount, in absolute term, is almost double to that of the previous year. Gross income of the bank has also increased from Rs. 11.91 crores to Rs. 13.75 crores.

Our advances have increased from Rs. 69.47 crores in 1982 to Rs. 80.29 crores this year registering a growth rate of 15.6%.

In keeping with the national objectives, we have been able to increase our Priority Sector advances to Rs. 22.01 crores representing 27.4% of our total advances. We have got considerable support from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and Industrial Development Bank of India who have assisted us in augmenting our lendable resources.

It is a matter of satisfaction that our recovery in the Priority Sector advances has been quite encouraging.

During the year under review, our Foreign Exchange Business has increased to Rs. 18 crores compared to Rs. 16 crores in the previous year. In this connection, I may mention that we have got a wide network of foreign correspondents. We have been offered a line of credit by the Hambros Bank Ltd., U.K.; this is an evidence of the image and reputation that your bank enjoys in international banking circle.

It is a matter of great satisfaction for me to report to you that we have maintained a very cordial industrial relationship in our bank throughout the year.

We have also been able to improve our organisational setup and quality of manpower by providing our officers and staff not only with in-company training but also by sending them to various training programmes conducted by the Bankers' Training College, Reserve Bank of India. Emphasis was laid on training in foreign exchange as this area is gradually becoming an important profit centre.

With the growth of the bank and in deference to the wishes of the shareholders, it has been felt that the capital base of the bank should be strengthened. Accordingly, a decision has been taken by the Board with the approval of the Reserve Bank of India, to increase the Bank's paid up capital to the extent of authorised capital by issue of rights shares. This I am placing before you for your consideration.

I take this opportunity to mention some of the areas which I feel are inhibiting more rapid growth. The Bank has not obtained any new licences for opening of branches during the last three years. We are actively pursuing the matter with the authorities concerned and I earnestly hope that some new branch licences will be granted to us soon.

It is pertinent to note that we have been operating in an area where economic growth is tardy. Within the constraints in which your bank is working, we are making our utmost endeavour to improve our position in the banking system. I hope with your support and active participation by the employees, we shall be able to achieve better results in the years to come.

I think, I shall be failing in my duty if I do not take you into confidence about the growing sickness in the industrial sector in the area of our operation. We are taking effective steps to revitalise such units but our contribution in this regard, you would appreciate, could only be partial. I, therefore, suggest that the burden of revival of sick units should be shared by all concerned agencies including Government. Adequate arrangements may be made for providing refinance to banks at concessional rates for helping revival of sick units.

Further, I think it will be worthwhile to examine the possibility of vesting statutory powers with the commercial banks as is being enjoyed by term-lending institutions to enforce securities without going through legal process. Limitations, as applicable to government dues, should be made applicable in case of all banks.

Considering the increase in establishment cost and higher rates of interest at present being allowed to depositors, it will be fair to review the existing interest-rate structure afresh including the desirability of discontinuance of interest tax.

To enable Banks to have a better fund management, it may also be considered whether the facility of currency chests could be extended to Private Sector Banks as has been done in the case of Public Sector Banks.

I further suggest that increase in Statutory Liquidity Ratio and Cash Reserve Ratio should be fixed in relation to the incremental growth of deposit in Banks rather than on the total deposit at a flat-rate as at present.

In conclusion, let me thank all members of the staff, our constituents, depositors, Government of West Bengal, Government of India, Reserve Bank of India, members of Board of Directors and you, the valued shareholders, for the continued support and co-operation extended to the Bank without which it would not have been possible to achieve progress in different directions.

Dated, the 22nd June, 1984

Note: **This does not purport to be the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.**

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

The Renaissance Man

RELAXING on a wooden bench in a single-storied house in Bangalore's conservative Basavanagudi area, the wrinkled old man smiled infectiously and proclaimed: "I am happy." That reaction to receiving last fortnight, the Jnanpith Award—the country's highest literary accolade—was characteristic of Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, 93, the Grand Old Man of Kannada literature. That same evening, Masti, as he is popularly known, planned to stroll down to a nearby club, a daily routine, and sit down to a game of rummy for half a paisa a point, which, he chuckles, should go down in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's lowest stakes for a card game.

But it is a measure of Masti's inherent modesty that he would fail to acknowledge that this day at least, the rummy game would have to proceed without him. The steady stream of visitors and the incessant ringing of the telephone predictably made sure of that as the congratulatory messages poured in from all parts of the state. Most, however, were tinged with an element of regret as well, regret that the award was long overdue. Speaking from Mysore, U.R. Ananthamurthy, novelist and critic, pointed out: "Masti should have got the award years ago. He is a major literary figure and his work is as good as anything else published anywhere in the world."

That is hardly an overstatement. Even in the twilight of his life, Masti still retains his phenomenal literary output, an output that includes 17 collections of poems, 18 plays, 26 autobiographical, biographical and critical works, and 17 collections of short stories produced over a span of seven decades. And, the literary flow shows no signs of drying up. Last fortnight, he published another short story in a local daily, rounding off the number of short stories he has produced so far to 80, most published under the pen-name Srinivasa. Little wonder that Masti is now clearly acknowledged as the father of short story writing in Kannada. Says well-known literary critic L.S. Seshagiri Rao: "It seemed as though the short story was waiting for Masti to come along. Before him, we only had poetry and drama. He is one of the great renaissance figures in Kannada literature." Adds A.S. Murthy Rao, former president of the Kannada Sahitya Parishad: "As a short story writer, Masti is in a class by himself."

The irony is that the acknowledged master of short story writing should win the Jnanpith Award for a novel he completed in 1956 when he was 65. The novel, *Chickaveera Rajendra*, his second, is not generally regarded as his best. It is essentially a historical novel on a profligate self-willed and unscrupulous king of that name who was the last ruler of the tiny state of Coorg (now Kodagu in Karnataka). The theme of Masti's novel is how a community disintegrates because the rulers are evil or have a misplaced sense of goodness. The Bharatiya Jnanpith in a resume of the novel said it is not merely the story of Coorg "but of the entire country in the 18th century presenting in a miniature convex mirror the complex encounter of the East and West both at the political and cultural planes."

But *Chickaveera* does represent a major watershed in Kannada historical literature. Before Masti appeared on the scene, historical writing consisted of romanticised and flowery accounts of various kingdoms written in a jingoistic style. Masti refused to follow tradition and whitewash historical events, and instead brought to light the sordidity and decadence. As Seshagiri Rao says: "Masti does not re-create the past in order to thrill and inspire. Instead, he gives you a stark picture of how corruption at the top seeps down into the entire system until it collapses."

Masti pioneered much the same thing with the Kannada short story, treading paths that none had dared before. Masti single-handedly brought the Kannada short story from its elevated and exaggerated position down to a more realistic level. Instead of heroic deeds in the life hereafter, Masti's short stories were about ordinary people—vegetable cutters, curd sellers, even prostitutes. His style was lucid and flexible and his language more colloquial. Recalls Gantoor Srinivasa Rao, former chief justice of Karnataka and a publisher: "When



RAJ CHENGAPPA

Iyengar: belated recognition

Masti's short stories were first published, it was an exhilarating experience to read them. It was a totally new style of writing and took us all by storm."

But even though his supremacy in short stories is unquestioned as is his all-round literary ability, his novels and poetry are certainly not in the same class as his short stories. Most critics acknowledge the 1977 Jnanpith Award winner Shivaram Karanth as the leading Kannada novelist for his ability to lay bare human relationships and values. Similarly, critics agree that Masti's poetry is restrained. Says one: "There does not seem to be enough warmth in Masti's poetry. They are pale and anaemic." In fact Kannada poetry is spearheaded by two former Jnanpith awardees, the late K.V. Puttapa and the late D.R. Bendre.

However, the depth and range that Masti brings to his short stories more than makes up for any deficiencies in

and poetic outpourings. And that arily because he has experienced f the emotions he portrays so in his own life. As he says, "My s and my life grew together. I saw their good and bad points, and ed them as I have seen it myself. I suffered. I have loved. I have lost. I been humiliated and I have been ho- too."

Masti's life does indeed read like one celebrated short stories. Born in a tiny hamlet called Masti in the district, he was brought up largely grandparents. His early life was terised by penury. At school in e, he ate at different houses that fed out of charity. Undaunted by pover- Masti performed brilliantly in his stu- hing his masters degree in lite- from the Madras Presidency Colle- standing first in the university. He ed this up by topping the Mysore service examinations and was appoi- s assistant commissioner for the ly salary of Rs 200 a month.

After that poverty and Masti parted ny. He rose steadily in government but never stopped writing. His s appeared regularly under his pen- Srinivasa, which was really a pet his mother used to call him by. His tongue is Tamil, but like many who have settled in Karnataka he mastered Kannada. Unfortunately Masti, in 1943 he was superseded by al of his juniors who were appointed ers by the then Maharaja of Myso- Humiliated, Masti resigned.

UT HE was now free from the shackles of governmental work, and pursued writing with an missionary zeal. Editing a Kanna- monthly called *Jivana* (life), he encou- Kannada writers and fought for the ation of Karnataka. It was around period that Masti wrote his two histo- novels, one of them being *Chicka-* He had touched his peak at that Even now, hindered by a failing eye- and trembling hands that make impossible, he dictates his stories. Masti's writings were really the between the old and the new, but his own particular construction of bridge. His stories deal with a broad of life and he writes with a rare of humanity, secularism and demo- idealism. He rarely uses the element prise, and critics feel he lacks form technique. But he has always broken barriers, writing boldly about sexual a time when it was taboo even

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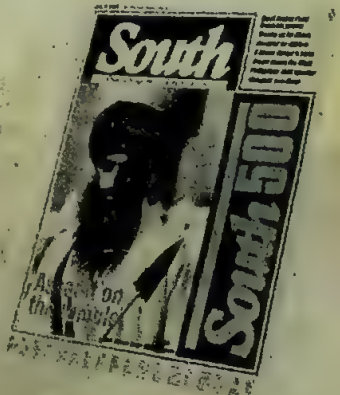
- South was among the first to reveal in June 1983, the major shift in attitude towards foreign investment by European, American and Japanese companies, which is now taking place in the developing countries.
- In April 1983 South was the first to report that the world's bankers were increasingly concerned that the Philippines would become the first Asian country to face a Latin American style debt crisis — something which became a reality and was only reported on by leading international publications five months later.
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to talk about it. At the same time, Masti is never vulgar or overly sensual. His writings have a sort of bubbly humour, but on many occasions it is used as a superficial covering for a story that has a powerful undercurrent of poverty and extreme suffering.

Yet, as a person, Masti remains deeply humane and religious. He believes strongly in God and feels that he is only an instrument being guided by a supreme power. Says Murthy Rao, who is himself 84 and has known Masti for more than six decades: "He is human to his fingertips. He has his roots in the older culture and is a deeply religious man who has been inspired by events of the past. He is a fusion of mysticism and ordinary life." Masti fluctuates between modesty and pride. While he talks of an inner force guiding him all the time he is acutely aware that he is a great writer and at times makes no bones about it. But his pride is not in the least offensive, it is more an acceptance of a reality.

In his autobiographical novel published in three parts, Masti observes: "The waves of the sea draw the log to shore and toss it about as long as it pleases and then toss it back to the shore. But this 'log' though weather-beaten and gnarled is yet to be tossed on its final shore. His journey has not ended. But his extensive literary travels have seasoned him to a rare maturity.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

INTERVIEW

"Literature acts as an auditor"

AT A ripe 93, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar is as alert as ever. He speaks as he writes: simply, directly with a liberal sprinkling of his own brand of humour. Soon after Iyengar won the Jnanpith Award, Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *had an hour-long interview with him in Bangalore. Excerpts:*

Q. How would you describe yourself right now?

A. As a very average man with ambitions and some little ability to work for it.

Q. Isn't that a humble assessment?

A. The moment I say I am big I cease to be big. It's like self-slaughter.

Q. Why did you take to writing?

A. I was born to write. Must have been. I don't know. This man (pointing to himself), he had to write. His nature was to write. He felt like writing. He had an impulse to write and an ability to write. He wrote.

Q. In many of your works you keep referring to an inner force that guides you. What is this force?

A. I don't know what that force was that forced me initially. I was not aware of the inner force until much later. Now I am aware. It has taken me 90 years to become aware. It is only towards the end that you suddenly realise 'oh' it was not I that was doing it. It was something inside me.

Q. And what is that something?

A. I realised that there is a power inside me. Guiding me all the time. I wrote at that time I believe in God and hence know for certain that he is watching me all the time. I do nothing. I am his instrument. Father thy will be done not mine, was said by Christ.

Q. Although you came from a traditional background and seem to be deeply influenced by ancient scriptures, your writing is far from conservative.

A. I am not an ancient man although I think that Indian tradition is the highest in the world. My religion has taught me to say this prayer every day: "May all the world be happy."



RAJ CHENGAPPA

Iyengar: "a power inside... guiding"

What is good in tradition I stand for. I throw out the rest. Christ is my teacher. Prophet Mohammed is another. I accept Marx and call his doctrine a religion. The core of all goodness is unselfishness.

Q. You were poor when you were young. What did it teach you?

A. Poverty taught me to be humble. My money has not ruined me.

Q. Why do most of your stories feature ordinary people?

A. They are the people I worship and love.

Q. And why do you write in such simple language?

A. I don't know any other language.

Q. Many critics feel your writing lacks form or technique. What do you feel?

A. Form comes from the subject. Every story is written in the way I consider it best to tell. You don't have to think of technique. When you breathe do you think of breathing? A story tells itself just as your breath or your blood flows.

Q. While your stories are sprinkled with humour there is no satire in them. Why?

A. I hate satire. Because I love my fellowmen, I can't laugh at them. I hate the idea of anybody feeling superior.

Q. Don't you think it is ironical that although you are considered the father of short story writing you won the award for your novel?

A. So long as they say I am a good writer it doesn't matter to me. The novel is as good as my other works. The idea (behind the award) is that I more or less began the renaissance in Kannada literature.

Q. Most historical novelists before you eulogised the age they were writing about. Why did you choose to differ?

A. They eulogised not knowing reality. I was not thinking of what was good in the old days. That's all gone. The evil is setting in. In every country wrong people are in power. Unless men who believe in the good actually fight against evil, people cannot prosper. But good men are not aggressive by nature.

Q. Why didn't you join politics?

A. I can't belong to any party. I am an auditor. I find fault with everybody. Literature acts as an auditor.

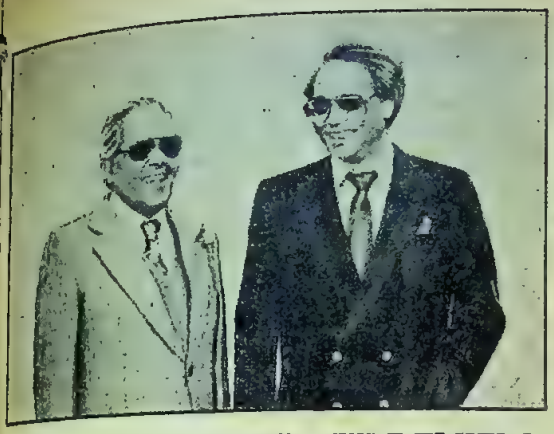
Q. Do you still have ideas for stories?

A. I have not dried up as yet. I am still coming up with ideas.

Q. Do you think you have done everything you wanted to?

A. Not at all. I am going on. My teacher told me to live for 100 years working all the time. When you finish you are at your father's (God's) feet. I don't know what he wants me to do after that: be a man again or a donkey.

ESCORTS



ESCORTS CORPORATE REVIEW AT THE 39TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON JUNE 30, 1984*

India today stands on the threshhold of an era of major change. The record food production of 149.8 million tons in 1983-84 and the rapid development of India's crude oil production at 29 million tons means that India will soon be free from two major areas of economic anxiety. With the food grain surplus and huge reduction in our import bill, India will have large reserves which can be fruitfully deployed for development and advancement. The results of several years efforts will also bring to India some of the latest technological advancements, which can revolutionise India's industrial development. These trends auger well for an exciting future in the years to come.

In the area of agricultural development, the Government has done a remarkable job. The hard working farmers are assured of dependable and attractive procurement prices and assured off-take by the Food Corporation of India. The banks have made world history in their extension of rural finance to the remotest villages. The creation of a huge infrastructure of irrigation and transport plus the ready availability of essential inputs like improved seeds, fertilisers, insecticides, pumpsets, tractors, etc., have all resulted in this increased production coming from increased yields i.e. increased output from the same scarce land.

It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that impressive as these gains have been, there is still colossal scope for further augmentation of yields. India's average yields compare poorly with that of world averages. However, the results of progressive farmers in Punjab, Haryana and in many progressive districts have clearly demonstrated that Indian farmers can get just as good yields as their counterparts elsewhere in the world and there is clear evidence that this healthy trend is spreading.

India's agricultural focus has, however, tended to concentrate on fine grains like wheat and rice and selected cash crops like sugarcane but a low priority is given for the development of oil seeds from new crops and coarse grains like maize which have a huge export potential.



Maize (or Corn) is the major food grain imported by Poland, Korea, USSR, Japan and many other snow-bound, meat eating countries where it is mainly consumed as animal feed. Grain exporting countries like U.S.A., Canada, Australia and Argentina demonstrate yields varying from 7 to 10 tons per hectare. Demand for maize in India is limited and yields per hectare is much lower — only 6 million tons per annum from 6 million hectares of land under maize cultivation. By providing the Indian farmers, engaged in maize production with imported maize seeds and cultivation technology, we could over a period of 18 to 20 months increase the yields per hectare from the present one ton to five tons. With improved varieties of high yield seeds, better price incentives and assured off-take, much better yields can be obtained in the case of maize, soyabeans, sunflower and safflower.

Similarly the export of Basmati rice, packed and ready to go into the super markets could bring in one to two billion dollars of export earnings and benefit millions of farmers. Thrusts for export of traditional items supported with incentives could benefit the much larger community of the rural and agricultural population, and be a major step in the eradication of poverty.
The Government plans to add 3.5 million hectares of land under irrigation which would certainly improve the lot for millions involved directly in agricultural operations in rural India.

Tractor: The catalyst

With Escorts' association with farm mechanisation, we cannot help but emphasise our conviction about the positive role that tractors can play in the eradication of poverty, by improving production and yields on farm lands. There is clear evidence in every district of our country, that tractors have become a community asset and is not just a privilege of a few owners. Surveys have repeatedly shown than an average tractor benefits over 20 to 40 other farmers and mainly the small farmers, some of whom cannot even afford to own or maintain a pair of bullocks. There are over 7,00,000 tractors in the country and not the slightest evidence that these have caused any displacement of labour. In fact, paradoxically, the higher yields through better cultivation and cropping intensity demand more permanent round-the-year labour. India's entire food surplus comes out of barely 40 districts (total 410 districts) of the country and it is significant that all these districts have thrived through mechanised farming. Successful cultivation requires a balance of all the inputs. It requires high yield, quick ripening seeds, irrigation, fertilizers and it also requires draft power to get all these inputs into properly prepared ground, in the shortest time available between cropping and harvesting.



The tractor is thus a catalyst and an enabler for the successful development of agriculture and rural prosperity. Without mechanised farming and irrigation, multi-cropping would not have been possible.

Non-Resident Investments

In the year under review, and till June 1984, the Company has been engrossed in a protracted controversy in the matter of non-resident investments. We would like to take this opportunity of reiterating our positive commitment to support a properly conceived scheme to attract non-resident Indian funds which would help to strengthen the national foreign exchange resources to finance important national projects and services. The incentives offered by the Government under the existing Non-Resident Investment Scheme is in consonance with the schemes in many other countries where the nationals of these countries earn a lot of foreign exchange and invest such funds in the country of their origin.



These schemes have proved very successful and NRI investments in bank deposits has been of the order of Rs. 2,000 crores in 1983 and is coming in unabated @ Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 crores per month. Similarly, investment in new Industries set up by the Non-resident Indians under the 74% and 40% equity participation schemes have also been successful and according to latest reports NRI industries involving Rs. 800 crores have already been licensed and/or are on the anvil. However, in the area of Portfolio Investment Scheme, there have been unfortunate developments and problems.

As regards NRI investments in Escorts, the matter is sub judice so we cannot comment on this aspect of the scheme but we would refer you to the remarks of **Dr. I.G. Patel** (former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India) brought out in an interview in the Sunday Observer issue of June 17, 1984 under the heading:

"Non-resident Company investment should be stopped."

Question:

What will be the effect on Indian Industry of the part played by public financial institutions, including the Reserve Bank, in the Escorts Affair?

Answer:

This has been a very unfortunate chapter. There's no denying the fact that the whole thing gives the impression that the voting powers of financial institutions have been used not to improve management but for something else, whatever that may be. If they wake up after all these years and use those powers this way, it does not look like their own initiative but the initiative of someone else.

At the same time I would say, as I have said before, that Indian Industry — should have been protesting unfair takeovers all these years within the country and should have demanded a code of procedures to be followed. Three things should happen as a result of the experience (in Escorts). Firstly, the policy of takeover bids, by whomsoever, should be explicit and clearcut so that, that kind of threat to efficient managements does not arise. Secondly, there should be a code of conduct for the financial institutions to exercise their power over units. Thirdly, our experience with this particular provision to attract non-resident investment, portfolio investment by companies, has led to more trouble than its worth and I would drop it. Let's not keep in on the statute book and create another kind of problem tomorrow with another company.

We would, however, like to reaffirm that the overall NRI investment and deposit scheme has been a great success and with some adjustments as suggested by **Dr. I.G. Patel** and **Shri L.K. Jha, Chairman, Economic Administration Reforms Commission, the scheme could contribute to a greater inflow of funds and technology from the patriotic and highly qualified persons of Indian origin settled in many foreign countries.**

Revolution in technology

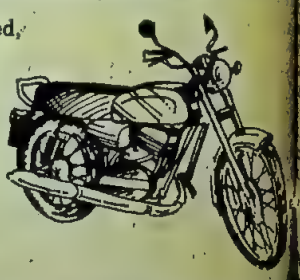
In the area of industry, the country is poised for a major technological change. We are proud of having been among the pioneers, spearheading the flow of advanced technology from Japan to India for the manufacture of Rajdoot-Yamaha motorcycles nearly five years ago. Since that date, there have been nearly 40 additional collaborations for cars, motorcycles, mopeds, light commercial vehicles and trucks, which in the next few years will bring a sweeping change to India's automotive industry.

One important aspect of this technological change is the colossal package of process engineering where the lessons of Japanese machines and production methods will contribute to make lasting changes in India's entire industrial future. With world class products made out of world class engineering, India will be able to compete more successfully in the world market.

Gains on all fronts

During the year under review, the Company has done extraordinarily well in almost all divisions. With the normalisation of bank credit from the nationalised banks, the tractor industry was again restored to health. We are, therefore, pleased to report that your Company has increased its sales by gaining a better market share in a larger market. In fact, Escorts tractors recorded an increase of 34% as against an overall industry increase of only 12% which is a great tribute to the in-house R&D and production alongwith marketing and after-sales-service efforts by the Company and its wide network of distributor/dealer systems.

The **Motorcycle Division** has also done well to notch an increase of 15.6% to reach 69,394 units. The spin-off's of advanced technology through our Japanese associations have resulted in quality improvements of the Rajdoot 175cc motorcycle which is today widely accepted as a standard for reliability and economy. During the year 1983, the 350 cc Rajdoot-Yamaha motorcycle with a 31 BHP, 2 cylinder, 2 stroke engine made with Yamaha technology was introduced. It had a slow introduction owing to the problems of customs duty, the closure of a few critical ancillaries plus the political situation in Punjab and Haryana, which are important markets that had prohibited the use of high power motorcycles. A thousand units were, however, marketed which have proved to be very popular among their users. Its high performance and fuel-efficiency are expected to make them especially attractive to the army and police who are keenly interested, and the prospects for 1984 are very encouraging. January 26, 1984 (Republic Day) was a day of special pride for Rajdoot-Yamaha 350 cc as they were escorting Prime Minister of India.



A new project with Yamaha for the high-performance, fuel-efficient 100 cc motorcycle, is progressing at good speed. The building and construction work is progressing satisfactorily for the establishment of a new plant at Surajpur, in a backward district of Uttar Pradesh. The first 100 cc Yamaha machine is expected to roll out of the new plant by early 1985 and this plant will be geared to manufacture 1.5 lakh (licensed capacity) motorcycles per annum. We would like to acknowledge our grateful thanks for the support we have received from the U.P. Government in the progress of this project especially in acquisition of land, essential inputs like electricity and water, in addition to the facilities assured to be provided for the drainage of Jamuna flood waters etc.

The major new project during the year was the successful commissioning of **ESCORTS-I, India's first and the world's most modern Floating Drydock. This** 11,500 ton vessel can repair ships upto 25,000 tons DWT and is provided with the most comprehensive facilities for high speed repair of modern ships. It is fully

ESCORTS

Management professionalism

These achievements reflect the professional management which marks every aspect of the Company's business. It is matter of great pride that Escorts is widely recognised as one of the most professionally managed "Indian" companies. The seven divisions of the Company and a number of semi-autonomous, corporate and other departments are managed by Vice-Presidents, Chief Executives and General Managers who function with a large degree of delegated management authority within the policy frame-work and guidance of the eminent Board of Directors. The Company has a very high Managers/Supervisors- to-workers ratio as is reflected by the fact that over 660 of the Company's 16,000 employees are earning over Rs. 36,000 per annum as per statutory annexure to the Annual Accounts Report.

The Escorts managers are professionally accountable in terms of their annual plans, budgets, capital outlays etc. but have a great deal of managerial freedom for the achievement of the committed plan and objectives. It is this combination of accountability, responsibility and delegated authority which has been one of the major factors in the Company's success. Escorts' managerial culture is the one where managers and workmen work together for the achievement of their objectives and this close association between managers and workers has been one of the the major factors for the exceptionally harmonious industrial relations the Company has enjoyed for the past many years.

We, alongwith Mr. Anil Nanda, Joint Managing Director, must express our gratitude for the advice and guidance provided by the Board of Directors who had to attend a large number of Board Meetings at short notice. Without their wholehearted guidance, the excellent results in sales, profits and the swelling of reserves would not have been possible.

We also wish to place on record the unstinting co-operation that we have received from the Vice-Presidents, General Managers, Managers, Supervisors and worker employees at every level in all the factories and offices of your large and growing organisations.

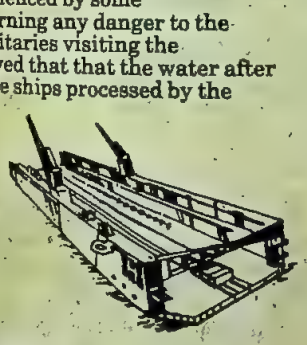
H.P. Nanda
Chairman and
Managing Director

Rajan Nanda
Vice-Chairman and
Managing Director

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ted by providing advanced training in ship
large number of Escorts personnel who were
ing to Japan. India spends nearly Rs. 75
ar on the repair of Indian ships in foreign
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national purpose of contributing to a
eduction in this avoidable foreign exchange
s already earned in foreign exchange by
reign ships visiting the Bombay Port.

ations of floating dry dock were seriously
ring the first five months of 1984 owing to
isdiction between Bombay Port Trust and
Trust as well as by the intervention of the
of Environment who had been erroneously
that the floating dry dock could cause pollution
damaging effect on our precious heritage
the nearby Elephanta Caves. Thanks to the
of the Prime Minister, the Department of
t and visits to the dry dock by the Governor
htra, Dr. Rajaramana, Chief of the Atomic
and other officers, the floating dry dock has
cleared till the end of November and will be
onstrate its importance to India's maritime
During this period, the dock will also be able to
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other divisions of the Company have
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on and profitability.
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t in our plants for the upgradation of
with the increased usage of
rmance, highly automated machines which
recedented accuracies much higher in output
ntial savings in costs. We are proud to be a
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Burman and the *Pantera* album (above): on the hit list

■ Beat it Michael Jackson, our very own **R.D. Burman** is rocking the rock world. So what if India's musical genius does borrow a tune or two from the West? This time, he has reciprocated right back with a song called *In every city* that is thumping around joyfully on the New York hit parade. It all started when Burman's friend Pete Gavankar, a micro-chip millionaire settled in the US, played his music to Latin-American musician Jose Flores. Flores liked what he heard, added a few Latino beats, and in a record 10 days the two cut an album called *Pantera*. And caramba, how the cross-country magic worked.

■ The first clean, unromantic Hindi film to come along about healthy football rivalry between two boys schools, and what happens—the leading lady goes and falls in love with the director. Last fortnight, **Deepti Naval** and **Prakash Jha**, the sensitive young director of *Hip Hip Hurray* got married quietly and then went and hip hip hurrayed it to the world. Jha, an award-winning documentary filmmaker and his blushing new bride have no plans to collapse into comfortable domesticity just yet. Deepti will act and assist her husband in his forthcoming film *Damul*—if she can keep her starry eyes off him, that is. Joked *Hip Hip Hurray* producer Manmohan Shetty, "It all started on the sets of this film. In f we can even have a freeze shot of the point they fell in love."

■ Papa is a chief minister and mama a high profile MP, but for daughter **Vijaya Patil**, "politics holds no interest". Give her instead some *ghungroos* and a *ta thaiya* beat, and this 26-year- old can show the world just where her interest lies. Last fortnight, at a function organised by the Shivali Cultural Society, Vasantdada Patil attended not as the chief minister of Maharashtra but as proud father of the bharat natyam dancer. And ever wondered how mama Shalinitai always manages to look so neatly manicured? Well, Vijaya runs a beauty parlour as well. Said she: "The beauty business is my profession and dancing my hobby." With one parlour already doing booming business at Mahim and another scheduled to open at Warden Road, the daughter is certainly living up to the standards of her parents.



Patil: sitting pretty



Jha and Naval: three cheers





Singh (top) an quick off the

■ It was quite bound to happen—a books on Punjab and the mark are authors **want Singh** and **Kuldip** who have started collecting data. "M going to be on the army in the temple," said Si want to get all the eye accounts." "And mine on the happening, the tion and the backg said Nayar, "I want to credible account." Sing obviously are doing the thing, much may depe who can get his book o When asked for a q quote Nayar laughed can I say, there is no s

SIGN POST

■ **Appointed:** Harish na as director-general darshan. He was till vice-chairman of the Development Author

■ **Died:** John Mar former headmaster School, Dehra Dun na. He joined the it started in 193 headmaster in 194 red in 1966. He w the Padma Shre

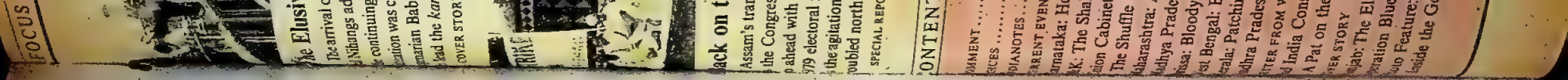


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The Elusive Solution

The arrival of Baba Santa Singh's colour- Nihangs added an intriguing element to continuing drama in Punjab. But the ation was complicated further with non- narian Baba Kharak Singh too offering lead the *kar sewa*.

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Corporate Raiders

In the biggest corporate coup so far, R.P. Goenka has virtually sewn up the takeover of Dunlop, and catapulted the Goenka group into the third place in the country's corporate rankings with a burst of growth, totally unmatched.

BUSINESS 80



Hegde Hunters

The resignations of two senior ministers from Karnataka's Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's Cabinet and the Janata Party raised the possibility of a renewed Congress(I) offensive to topple yet another opposition government.

CURRENT EVENTS 17



ack on the Boil

Assam's tranquil spell was rudely broken the Congress(I) Government decided to ahead with the elections on the basis of 979 electoral rolls. Fresh violence erupted the agitation got a fresh lease of life in the oubled north-east state.

SPECIAL REPORT 120



The College Craze

The Maharashtra Government's decision to give clearance to three new private medical colleges and the existing glut of engineering colleges has raised a storm of protest. Especially as the quality of teaching has deteriorated a great deal.

EDUCATION 134



Battle of the Sirens

An epic battle is raging in the Hindi film industry over who will be the next No. 1 heroine. Although there are four relatively new contenders for the crown, the race is clearly in favour of the sensational southern import Sridevi.

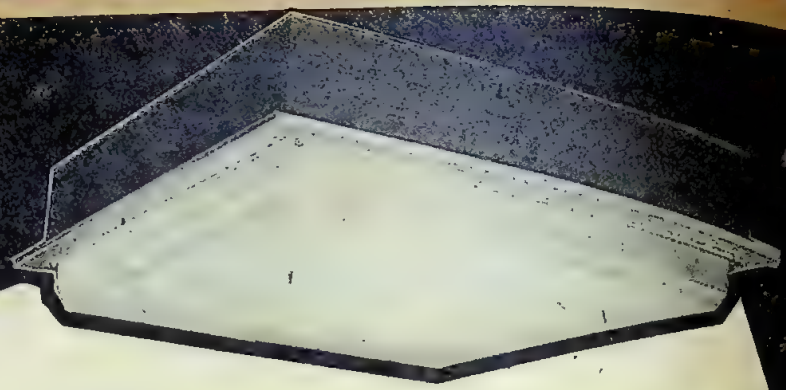
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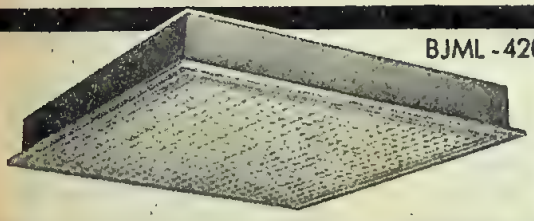
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Cover photograph by BHAWAN SINGH

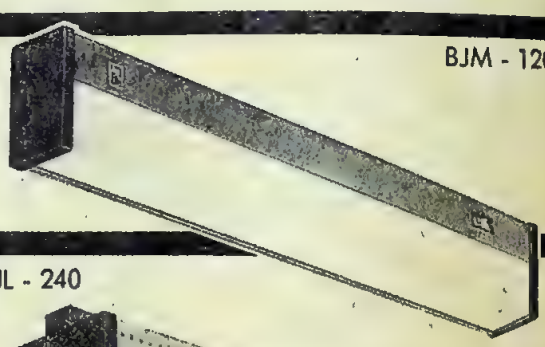
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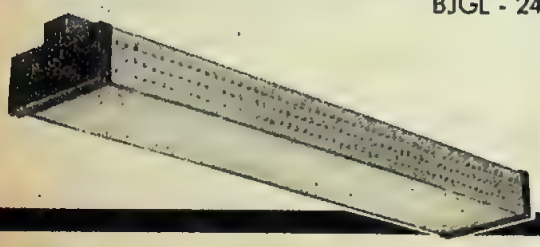
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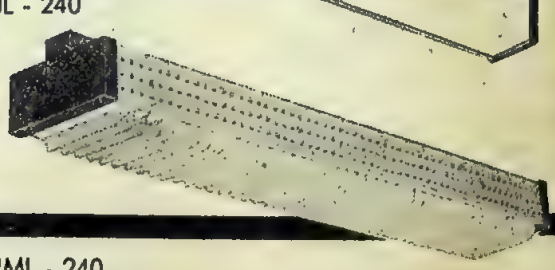
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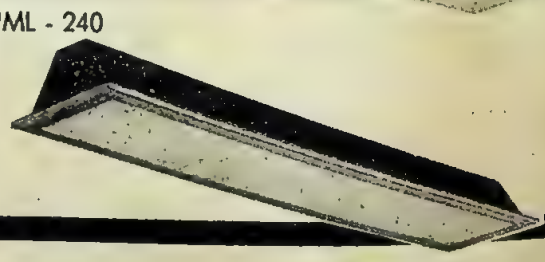
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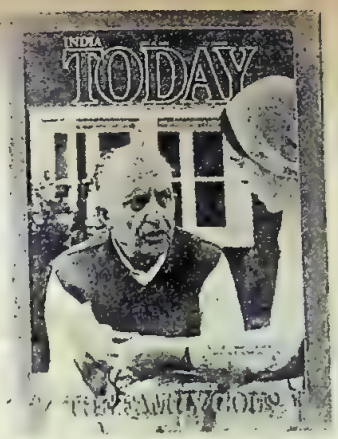
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FAROOQ'S FOIBLES

The detailed account of the toppling of the Farooq Abdullah ministry ("The Family Coup", July 31) was superb. Farooq spent all his time blaming the Centre for each and every unwanted incident that took place in the state during his tenure as chief minister. He always claimed that having ample proof about the involvement of the Congress(I) in all these incidents would help him gain popularity. Instead if he had spent his time controlling the law and order situation it might have been better.

Gulbarga, Karnataka — PRADYUMNA HEJIB

■ The dismissal of the Farooq ministry is typical of the moghul king being dethroned by his own kith and kin. But this time it has been masterminded by a pawn in the Centre's political game—the governor. The governor is basically just a ceremonial head, representing the policies and principles of the Centre but in Kashmir Jagmohan has proved his allegiance beyond doubt.

It is again the election stint whereby the Congress(I) seems to emerge as the sole saviour of the country. It cleverly contrived a situation in Kashmir that pinpointed anti-Indian feelings.

Bangalore — APARNA ACHAR

ONE-SIDED PICTURE

The "Operation Whitewash" (July 31) has summed up the cold reaction of the people to the long-awaited White Paper, which fails to give an accurate analysis of the Punjab problem. Instead of tracing the background of the Akali agitation it gives a one-sided picture of the past two years' events. It leaves many questions unanswered. In short the White Paper is a systematic propaganda against the Akalis in particular and the Sikhs in general.

Mohali — SEWA SINGH

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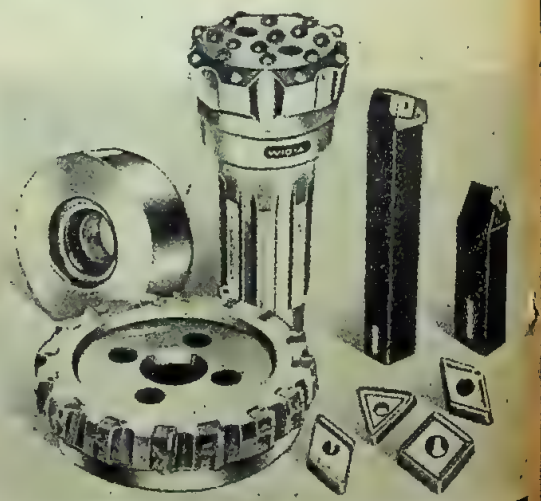
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POWER PROBLEM

The cover story ("Groping in the dark", July 15) was timely, explicit and presented an accurate picture of the power situation in the country. But your article should have laid more emphasis on the miserable power crisis in Bihar. Except in Patna and maybe one or two industrial towns there is hardly any place in the state where people get more than four to six hours of power in a day. You should have kept Bihar in the special category of 75 per cent and above power cuts.

MD. EHTESHAM A. USMANI
Patna

■ The cover photograph was excellent. It gives us an idea of how to put the electric bulbs to creative use. Who knows, we may be amidst the darkness, groping our way to a bright new era of mass creativity.

DEEPAK GOGOI
Dibrugarh, Assam

■ The story covered the thermal power generation scene in the country fairly in depth, but failed to make a study of the hydroelectric power generation and the controversial nuclear power programme in the country. The story should also have made a foray into the possibilities of solar power in a country which is sunbathed most of the year..

RAMJI R. ABINASHI
Bombay

■ The cartoon in the cover story was splendid. It correctly depicted what our power projects ail from, bungling and looting by bureaucrats and politicians.

TATYA TENDULKAR
Kolhapur

TIME KILLING

The interview with President Zia-ul-Haq (July 15) was just time killing. How can you expect the President to accept the fact that his country was supplying arms to Sikh extremists? You should have chosen questions which were not so direct and yet made Zia reveal the facts.

T. SHARAD
Manik

■ The interview with General Zia-ul Haq proves him to be a real hypocrite. Every Indian knows that the Pakistani Government along with some others colluded with the terrorists.

K. KHADER BASHA
Vijayawada

■ General Zia is known to be a devout Muslim, so one hopes what he has said in the interview is true. However, his clasping Dhillon in the photograph reveals much more than a yatri clasp.

DR A. SARUP
New Delhi

VOICES OF PROTEST

Referring to the article "North American Sikhs: The Voices of Protest" (July 15) it was natural that the Sikh sentiments throughout the world were hurt due to the army's action, but if rational and elite people become so outrageous what does one say about the poor uneducated ones. It was everybody's concern that the sanctum sanctorum should be freed from the clutches of criminals and religious fanatics who were killing innocent people. A temple's sanctity is more at stake when it becomes a centre for harbouring criminals and smugglers.

RAMESH JOSHI
Ranchi

■ The "Voices of Protest" brought home the fact that the Government of India as well as the media have not been successful in convincing the Sikhs at home and abroad that the army had to be brought in to liquidate the terrorists. The common Sikhs are being misled by people like Ganga Singh Dhillon and Jagjit Singh Chauhan who because of vested interests are convincing them that they are in danger in this country.

K.S. KUMAR
Bhavnagar

UNFAIR BLAME

It is unfair to blame the administration for the poor conditions of the beggars' homes ("Dungeons of Doom", July 15). Barring a few individual cases, begging is practised as a profession and in view of the sympathetic attitude shown towards them, the evil is fast spreading. The sooner we realise that real charity does not lie in providing free facilities to the beggars the better. Instead of blaming the Government everyone should make efforts to infuse the spirit of 'work and eat' amongst them.

J.R. LAROIYA
Noida

A CLARIFICATION

In our issue of May 1-15, 1981, we published an item on Karnataka entitled "Skeletons in Rao's Cupboard" in which we had stated that "Rao and his Finance Minister, Veerappa Moily, have been the target of sustained official investigations by a team of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials. The team allegedly unearthed, during a careful combing operation, spread over 10 days, a huge cache of hard cash and other types of 'donations'."

On further enquiry we find that both Rao and Moily were not the targets of any investigations by the CBI. We regret the error.

—Editor

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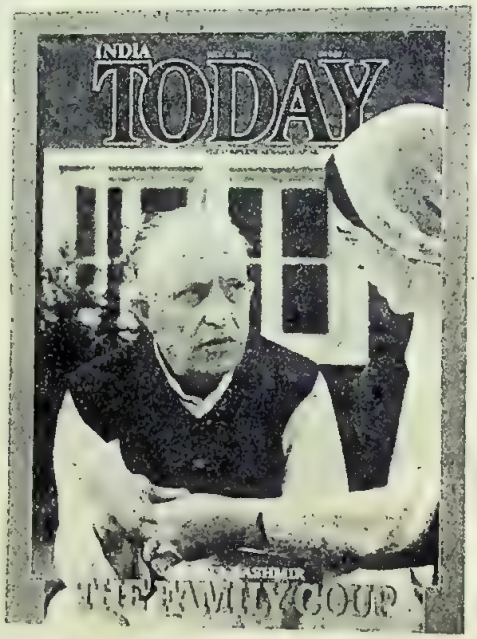
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INDIA TODAY

THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

The Foreign Hand Syndrome

THERE is much to be said for the wisdom that is contained in the fables of old. Remember the one about the boy who cried 'wolf'? The one who was devoured by a wolf when village folk, tired of his false alarms shrugged off his cries as just another prank when a wolf actually appeared on the scene? There is a lesson here for those who are crying 'foreign hand' to explain away the problems that this country is facing. Time and again, whenever there is trouble in one corner of the country or other, the first cry is that the foreign hand is responsible. This isn't new; it's been like this for years, and seems to have become a reflex reaction.



Illustration by AJIT NINAN

The point is not that there is no foreign hand. Most certainly, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, particularly those of the Third World and among those the ones, like India, that display any degree of independence, has become a part, however distasteful, of the conduct of international relations. And, it is reasonable to suppose that if such things happen in Poland or Chile, then they must be happening closer at hand, in India and its neighbourhood. Indeed, there are celebrated examples of this that range from subtle attempts to influence policy to the overthrow of duly established governments to blatant invasions. Of this there has never been any doubt. Nor has there ever been doubt that the worst practitioners of this kind of neo-colonialism are the superpowers who, in whichever words they cloak their actions, are basically guilty of the same kind of interference in the affairs of other nations.

No, the point is different. For one, similar charges have been made against India from some of its neighbours. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have each, at one time or other, in one way or other, accused India of interfering in their internal affairs. It becomes a lot easier to deny such allegations when the accuser fails to come up with any evidence of interference. For another, people who shout from the roof-tops about the foreign hand should realise that nobody will believe them unless they are able to substantiate the charge, if not every time they make it then in at least one instance. At the level of a defensive assertion, it carries little conviction. At best it appears to be no better than a cover-up operation; at worst, it encourages a cynicism that might lead people to behave like the village folk in the fable who didn't rush to the boy's help when the wolf actually struck.

This pall of cynicism has descended each time the charge has been made in recent times. And, each time the effect has been to deflect thinking from where it ought to be directed: the true cause of the problem and its solution. In the process, neither end is achieved: there is general disbelief associated with the accusation among the right thinking people and those interests abroad who are actually interfering in India's internal affairs, aren't tarnished or publicly shamed by exposure. Statements in Parliament, that it is not in the national interest to name names and that in any case everyone knows who's behind it, are less than convincing. Surely any hand, foreign or not, which is responsible for exacerbating problems like Punjab, Assam or Jammu & Kashmir, deserves to be effectively quashed.

To take the Punjab problem, of course interests outside the country are interested. A large number of Sikhs living abroad have made no secret of their Khalistan. And they have powerful supporters in foreign countries. If that is a foreign hand, then obviously there is nothing more to be said. But the language and temper of the charge implies that it is not the Sikhs abroad that the Government has in mind so much as foreign governments. If that is so, and if there is more than just circumstantial evidence, it is the duty of the Government to share whatever knowledge it gathers or has with the people of this country.

There is good reason why the Government must share its knowledge and any information it has with the public at large and why such information must be disseminated as widely as possible. For people must see how easy it is for malevolent interests to exploit their grievances, to turn legitimate agitations to the detriment of the national interest and to exploit events in this country. For the basic truth is that the foreign hand could stir up no trouble if it weren't for the inner weaknesses in this country, the strains and rents in its social and political fabric, tensions which set one community against another or fragment its society into conflicting, competing parts.

If one is to believe that a foreign hand is at work, then it is a reflection of India's own weakness, and even as decision-makers in office fulminate against its machinations they must remember that external interference can ultimately be controlled only if India's own problems are held in check with the support of the people and its society welded into a homogeneous whole.

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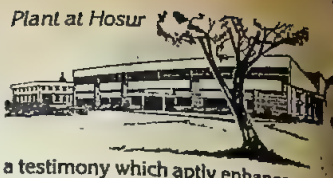
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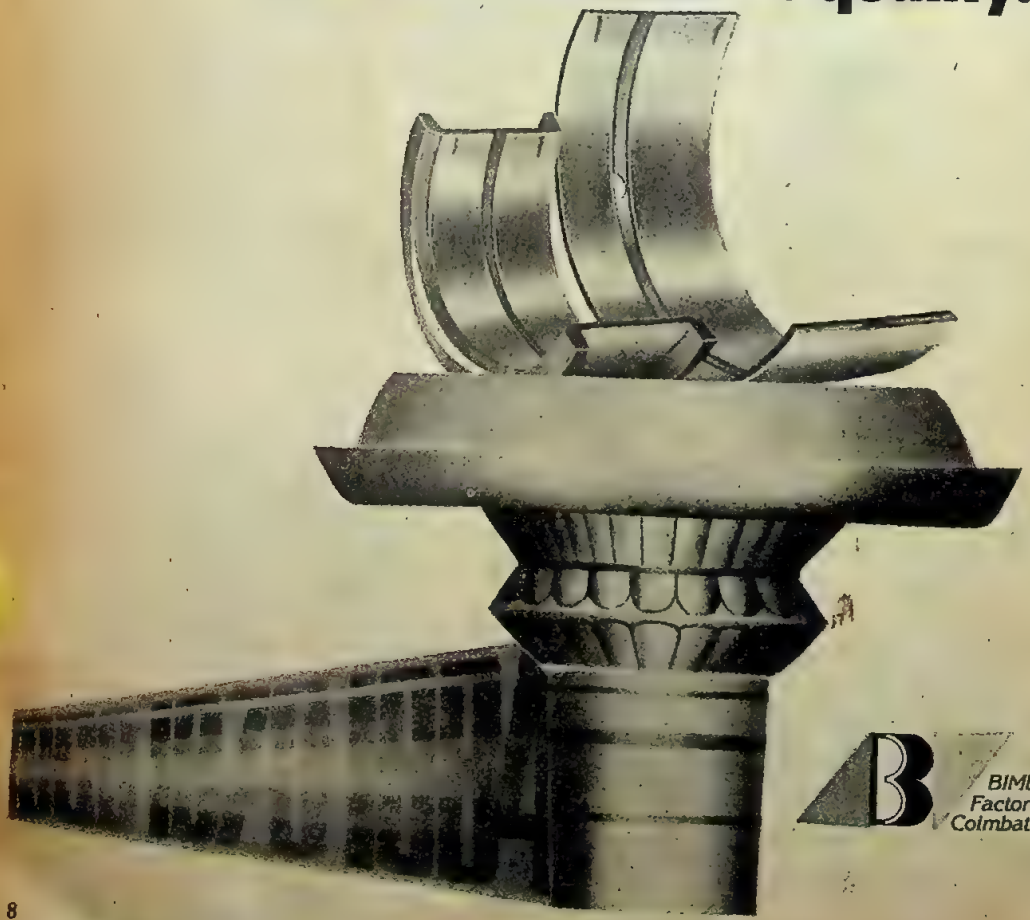
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• *Here is a person (N.T. Rama Rao) who tried to act as a hero in films, but is now acting as a villain. He performed the role of Lord Rama in films but is acting as Ravana here.*

■ VASANT SATHE *at the National Development Council meet in New Delhi*

• *Remove those* boodhas *(old men) today (from the Congress-I)! Retire those diabetes-affected old men instantly! Rajiv's party must come into power.....The day is not far off when these old men will start dying so rapidly, the flag will be at half-mast for two whole months!*

■ DADA KONDKE *in The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *As chief minister in Mantralaya, I was in a state of tension all the time. As an accused in Mr Justice Khatri's court, I am in a state of relaxation all the time.*

■ A.R. ANTULAY *in The Sunday Observer*

• *I cannot entertain the preposterous idea of a plebiscite. I am an Indian and I do not want Kashmir to get dismembered from the rest of the country.*

■ FAROOQ ABDULLAH In The Week

• *I do not want to be a great man. I want to be a man who goes around with a little oil can and when I see a breakdown, offer my help.*

■ BABA AMTE *quoted in Gentleman*

• *Except for the man who is sitting at the other end and the table top, I eat everything.*

■ H.N. BAHUGUNA *about his food habits in The Hindustan Times*

• *To survive in the jungle of our cinema, a film maker has to behave like Tarzan. He must be friendly with all the chimpanzees, jump from one tree to another, walk around with his arms around a semi-nude Jane in public, and if all these devices fail, wear tiger-skin shorts to attract attention.*

■ SAEED MIRZA *in The Times of India*

• *I never relax totally unless I am married to a man.*

■ SIMI GAREWAL *in Celebrity*

• *It's sad that a man like Amitabh Bachchan who is so gifted...has been reduced to becoming merely an efficient actor...since he's become a heart-throb, he's merely efficient. He has a misconception about his greatness, he started believing in his own myth.*

■ NASEERUDDIN SHAH *in Imprint*

• *The irony is that we are constantly making films against the establishment and then asking the establishment to buy them...The country does not deserve good cinema.*

■ SAGAR SARHADI *in Current*



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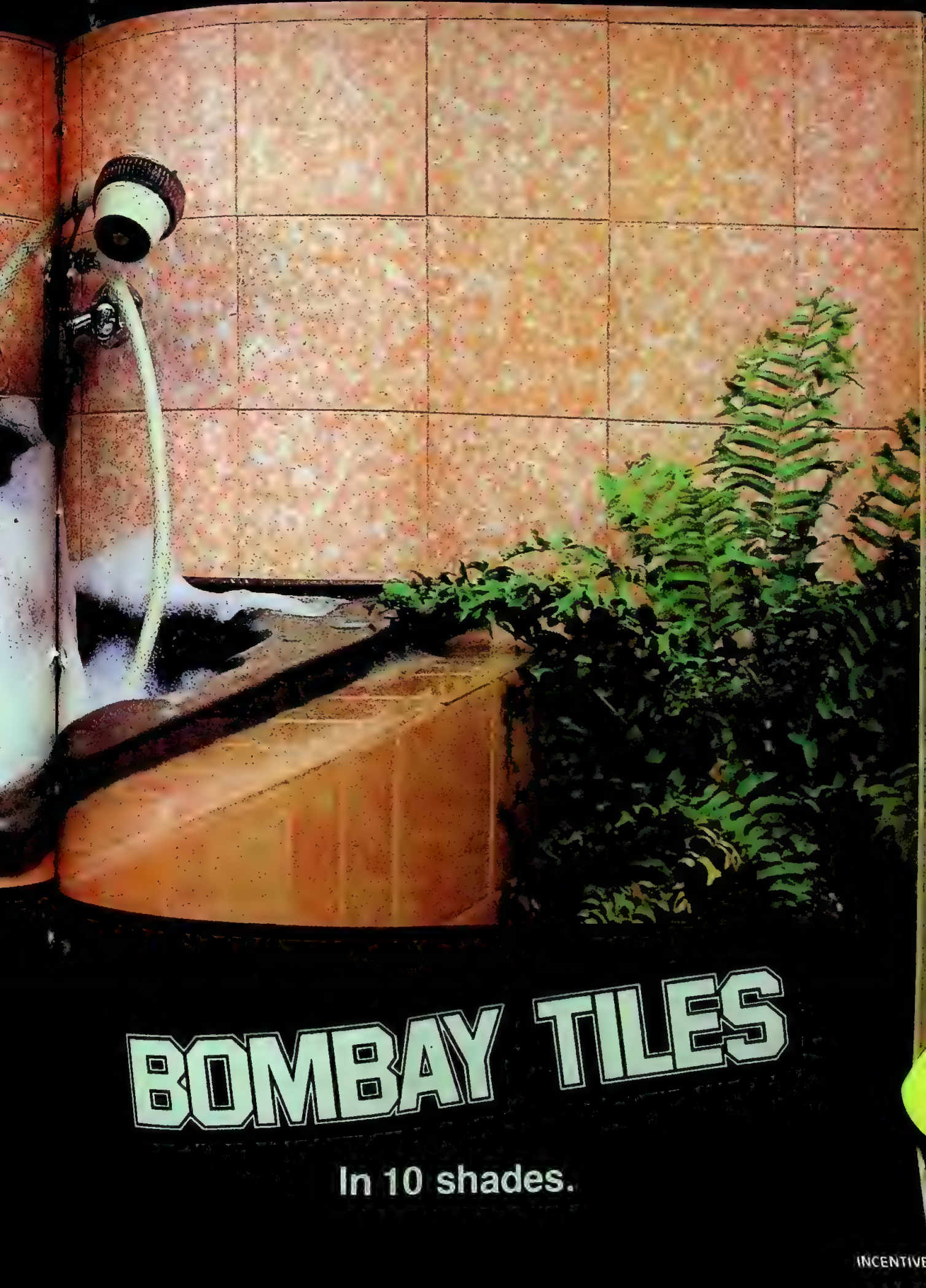


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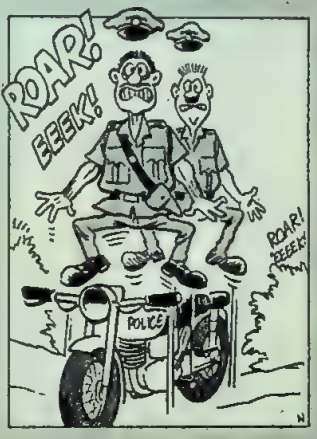
■ It is a song which is supposed to be sung with reverence and pride, and the words written by one of India's greatest poets evoke the land of glory that is India in phrases of purest beauty. In Maharashtra, however, a lot of people appear not to sing it with the right amount of reverence, as Education Minister Sudhakar Naik found out recently.

Naik has been visiting schools all over the state in the past 18 months and, on a number of his visits, he was serenaded by a group of children singing *Jana gana mana* in a manner which left no doubt in his mind that the children had had only very casual acquaintance with India's national anthem. They either got the words all wrong, or they missed out a number of them—which took quite a bit away from the coherence of the song—or they sang the stanzas in the wrong order. According to the aggrieved Naik, the national anthem was not sung properly in 95 per cent of Maharashtra's schools. The minister has now left instructions with the teachers that they should teach the students how to sing Tagore's classic properly.

TIGER SCARE

■ Mention the word 'tiger' to a member of the Bangalore police force and he will do one of two things: get into his jeep or onto his motorcycle and rush away with siren screaming or catch you by the neck and try to strangle you. The reason for this hysterical behaviour is not far to find. For some days now, a duo of motorcycle riders has been roaming the streets of the city snatching necklaces from the necks of women walking alone.

A month ago, the police launched Operation Tiger to nab these fellows. The moment the code words "Tiger strikes" went out over the airwaves, about 3,000 policemen were supposed to hare all over the place, block routes and so on. Last fortnight, the code words did flash to all police receivers



when a girl's chain was snatched at 10 a.m. As 200 traffic policemen hurtled all over the place and 250 other vehicles did much the same thing, the duo struck again. Late that evening the police admitted they had drawn a blank, except for four motorcycles which were on their way to the RTO for registration—they had no number-plates. But to the chagrin of the police the daring duo was still at large.

ROUGH JUSTICE

■ The rich and the powerful don't always have it their way. A living proof of this is a contractor in Patna. He is married and has three children but that didn't prevent him from casting his roving eye on the daughter of an aged Sarvodaya worker whom he pestered every now and then to give him the girl in marriage. Not surprisingly, the old man refused.



Unfortunately for him and the girl, the contractor had a dirty trick up his sleeve: he had forged a love letter which he claimed had been sent to him by the girl and he threatened to use it to force the father to give in.

The old man sent his daughter away to his village, far away from any roving eye. Then he called in the Mahila Mukti Manch and Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini. Workers of the two organisations soon discovered that the contractor's plans for the girl were not the cleanest. They ran him to ground at his residence and confronted him with the evidence and asked him to apologise. They proceeded to give him a thorough haircut, paraded him through the streets and handed him over to the police. There is justice on this earth sometimes, although it may be a little rough.

RAT RACE

■ Calcutta is looking for a Pied Piper, or for that matter a piper of any kind. The reason, of course, is rats, dozens of them, who have turned a small plot of land facing opposite the Raj Bhavan into a kind of miniature amusement park, watched indulgently by Rash Behari Bose on his pedestal.

The amusement park was originally supposed to be a small patch of green surrounded by fencing. Nobody is quite sure when the rats came to settle there but settle they did and soon there was just one plant left struggling to stay upright on a ground riddled with furrows. What is more, chanawallas are doing brisk business nearby, because apparently the done thing now in



the neighbourhood is to stand at the railings and watch the rodents put on their show, feeding them chanas all the while.

Meanwhile, officials are busy passing the buck to each other. The corporation says the plot belongs to the PWD and the PWD is reportedly surprised to find it has a rat race on its hands. Any sign of that Piper?

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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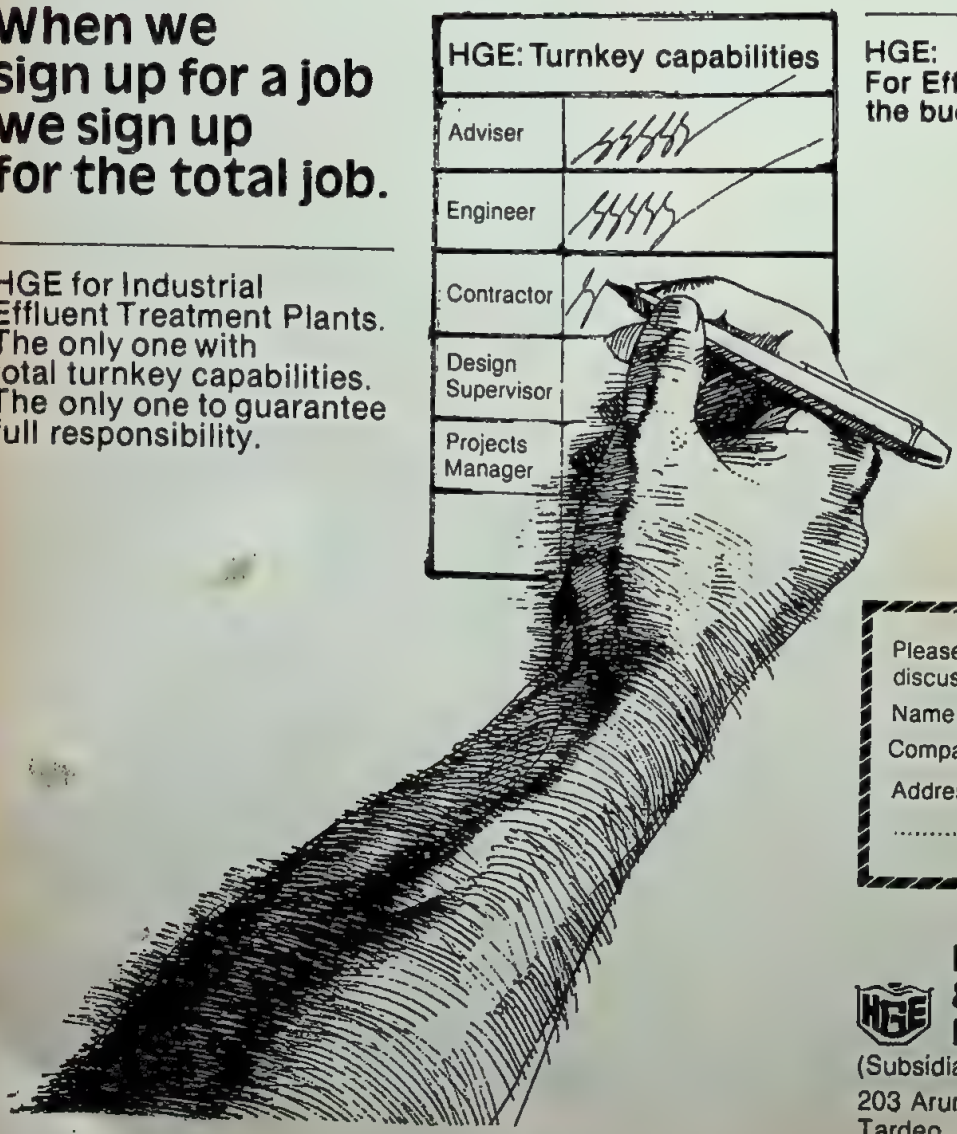
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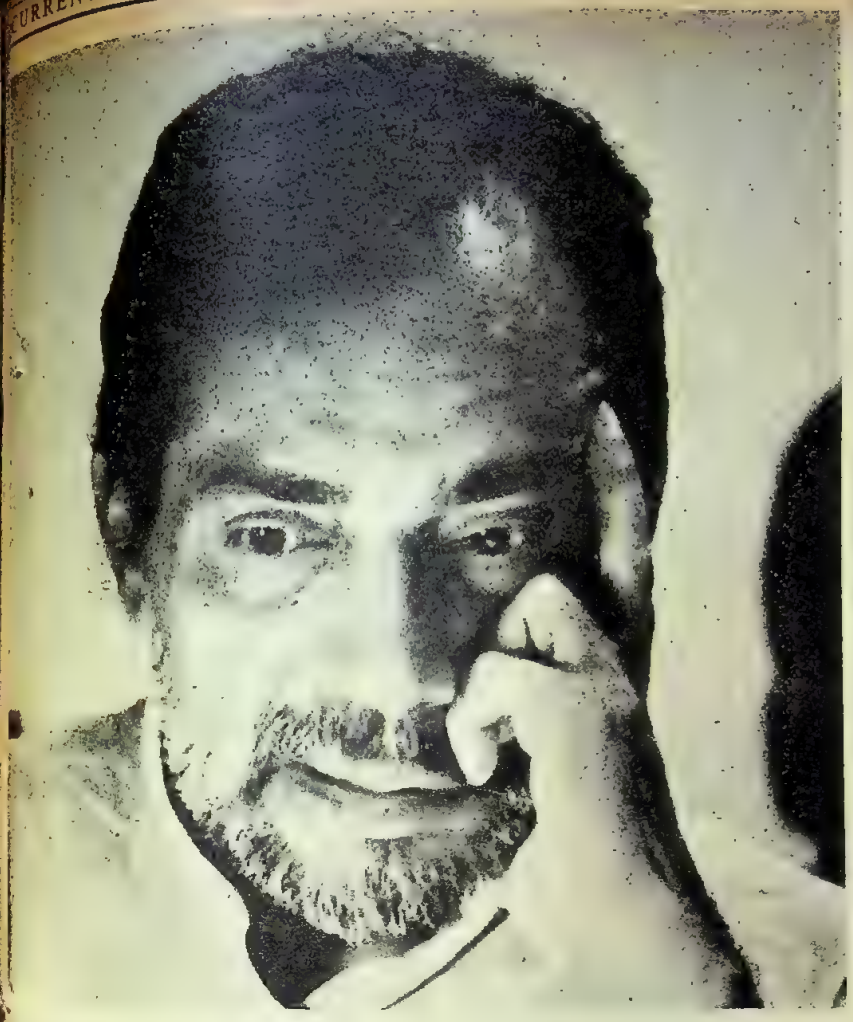
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KARNATAKA

Hegde Hunting



RAMAKRISHNA Hegde, Karnataka's hard pressed chief minister, has been in a tight spot so often that he has learned to take adversity in his stride. But the blows that struck last fortnight in rapid succession may be harder than anything he has had to contend with in the past. For the first time in his 18-month-long tenure, Hegde had to cope with the resignations of two ministerial colleagues. Labour minister Aziz Sait and Social Welfare Minister Chandraprabha Urs resigned from the Janata Party and took their seats as independents in the Assembly within days of resigning from the cabinet as a part of a party-prompted 'Kamaraj Plan' which saw the entire state cabinet hand in their papers to Hegde.

Sait's and Urs's actions were clearly much more than random decisions. Even as the news buzzed over news agency wires, top state Congress(I) leaders, former chief minister Gundu Rao and legislative party leader Veerappa Moily winged their way to Delhi for strategy sessions with the high command to see how they could take advantage of the deteriorating situation in Bangalore. In the capital too was Kranti Ranga leader S. Bangarappa, who had parted company with Hegde and has long nursed ambitions to be chief minister.

After sessions with party functionaries, Rao exuberantly told INDIA TODAY: "Since the ground is slipping from under Hegde's feet he will make some desperate moves to remain in office. I have taken the

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

"There will be no fallout"

KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde was busier than usual in the days that followed the departure of two ministerial colleagues from the Janata Party. But he was able to talk to Bangalore Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA in between cabinet meetings, having spoken with Correspondent K. BHANUMATI earlier about the resignations en masse from his cabinet. Excerpts from both interviews.

Q. *Why did Chandraprabha Urs and Aziz Sait quit their posts?*

A. Maybe they felt that I was going to drop them and rather than face the humiliation of being dropped, they chose to leave in a dramatic fashion hoping to salvage their reputation.

Q. *Were you going to drop them?*

A. I handn't made up my mind.

Q. *Do you think others in your party will follow suit?*

A. There is going to be no fallout. My party will hold. I am going to be around for some more time.

Q. *Why are you delaying the process of reshuffling your cabinet?*

A. This matter of resignations has been actively considered only the last few days. Expansion and reshuffling are not unusual occurrences. Mrs Gandhi does so every three months.

Q. *Why do you allow such contradictory statements regarding resignations of ministers to fan so much speculation and confusion?*

A. Let me tell you how the whole thing happened. My ministers took sheets of paper and gave me their resignations without batting an eyelid, voluntarily, even before the cabinet meeting began. I then told them that this was a purely internal matter and if it went to the press it would spark off violent speculation. In spite of this it got to the press. My information minister called me and I asked him to tell the press that the ministers had resigned.

Q. *Haven't the MLA's who asked for the resignations brought a bad name to the party by ventilating their grievances?*

A. I don't think so. They are all concerned about the party's welfare.

prime minister's blessings to frustrate his attempts." While the Congress(I) could only be expected to try and take advantage of Hegde's discomfiture, speculation was more concerned with whether or not the resignations had anything to do with Congress(I) manoeuvres. Moily expressed his indignation, saying: "We are not interested in demolishing a house which is about to collapse under its own weight." But Karnataka Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (KPCC-I) chief K.H. Patil was less coy. He said: "We will not interfere in the Janata Party's affairs, but we will not run away if we are asked to form a government."

More than anything else, it was the timing of the resignations which gave the Congress(I) hope. Coming in the wake of the Centre's decisive action in Punjab and the toppling of the Farooq Abdullah government in Jammu & Kashmir, it raised the image of a Centre out to replace opposition governments in the state by any means. Congressmen themselves fuelled such speculation by their loose utterances. Last month the Congress(I)'s Council leader, T.N. Narasimhamurthy said that there was a Shah in the Karnataka cabinet—a reference to J & K Chief Minister G.M. Shah, who broke with Abdullah and toppled him—and he would soon appear on the scene.

As for the Janata Party drop-outs, their resignations reflected their long-standing differences with Hegde and his unwillingness to give them portfolios of importance. While Urs was unavailable for comment, Sait felt it was only a matter of time before others left the Janata Party as well. Said Sait: "If the Hegde Government is not dismissed, at least there will be a different government. I don't dismiss the possibility of President's Rule or the suspension or dissolution of the Assembly soon." This was a slightly different tune from the one he sang at his press conference when he said he had no interest in toppling the Government but was more keen to let it rectify its mistakes.

Significantly, Sait admitted that he would remain an independent only for a short time though he declined to name the party he may join. And he made it a point to say that no Congress(I) politician had yet approached him. One person who obviously didn't believe this was Hegde, who wrote Sait (and Urs) saying: "Several ministers at the cabinet meetings alleged that you were hobnobbing with the Congress(I)." Whatever the back room moves may have been, the desertion by Sait and Urs has once again raised the possibility of the Hegde Government's premature demise. The seeds for dissent within the Janata Party were sown when the 32-member Kranti Ranga legislature party merged with the Janata. Soon after, Bangarappa left the fold, but the others remained—and ties between them and the other Janata Party members were never tension free.



The desertion by Sait and Urs has once again raised the possibility of the Hegde Government's premature demise.



The resignations had their roots in an episode last fortnight in which a 38-member group of Janata MLA's had met and demanded the resignation of the Council of Ministers so that Hegde's hands were strengthened and he could remake his cabinet.

Hedge has been under pressure for more than a year to expand his council of ministers to accommodate different interest groups within his party. In fact, he has often announced his intension to expand his cabinet—the latest declaration being in May last—to improve the efficiency of his administration.

Last fortnight's moves haven't been of much help. Although the resignation call was welcomed widely in the Cabinet, there were some discordant notes. Public Works Minister H.D. Devegowda proclaimed: "Though the MLA's have expressed a point of view, their intention is not bad and is to be welcomed." But Youth Welfare Minister P.G.R. Sindhia was not so sure: "Though in my personal opinion these resignations were unnecessary and may seem a *tamasha* to the people, they have eased the pressure on the chief minister." Hegde himself, suspected of having engineered the whole thing, was guarded. Speaking to INDIA TODAY he declined to see the act as being anti-party and admitted that some seven MLA's had, in fact, told him about the meeting before it occurred but that it would discuss the performance of the ministers. Said he: "I said okay, if you are meeting for this purpose it is not an act of indiscipline. The only mistake they committed was to give to the press their suggestion that ministers should resign, which created a stir."

The MLA's responsible for the move were far from apologetic. Said one: "The whole idea behind our meeting was to create an atmosphere in which Hegde would be saved from the embarrassment of sacking anyone." Admitted another member of the group, Bapu Gowda: "The toppling game has been going on for some time in Karnataka and we felt that after the Farooq government's dismissal we should meet and strengthen the hands of the chief minister."

Whether or not it does that remains to be seen, but the move has put Hegde on the spot. For one, the ministers concerned took their own time in handing in their resignations, and Hegde didn't have them all for a full five days. For another, till the governor accepts them formally the ministers are holding temporary charge and the administration is threatened with instability. This opens the possibility that the Congress(I) might betempted to make yet another attempt to bring down the Hegde Ministry.

More important, Hegde decided to postpone cabinet expansion by a month because he was obviously caught between bringing back people who had been loyal to him through these difficult months and giving berths to those to whom he had promised them soon after the election. Hegde himself countered these arguments saying that there was no question of administrative instability and that the

matter of the resignations had not been actively considered except in the last few days. But he did admit to being under pressure to accommodate more aspirants than he had room for. Said he despondently: "This is unfortunately a fact of present-day political life. A political worker first wants to become a legislator. He then thinks he is fully qualified to become a minister. We have not developed a system in which powers and responsibilities are distributed on the basis of experience and performance."

Congress (I) sources aver that Hegde had promised a large number of political supporters jobs at the head of public sector corporations and in his ministry and was unable to satisfy them. The only way he was able to keep potential dissidence in check was to alert his party to the periodic efforts made by the Congress (I) to topple his government. Hegde denies this, but there is little doubt that he has been eager to rid his cabinet of some of its publicly better-known members who have crossed swords with him on one occasion or another. It is no secret that he has been looking for an excuse to rid himself of Sait who has been publicly opposing him on the status of Urdu. Nor has he been particularly satisfied with the ministerial performance of Chandraprabha Urs, a political force in her own right, whose handling of her social welfare portfolio has been less than a success.

In fact, the view in the Janata Party is that Sait and Urs resigned from the party because they realised that they were being dropped from the cabinet, and decided to quit the party rather than face that humiliation. What had held Hegde back earlier was the fact that Urs was the only woman in the cabinet and Aziz one of two Muslims. Urs had, in fact, been disgruntled for some time since she was deprived of the Excise Ministry and handed social welfare.

But despite Hegde's apparent optimism, the resignations could have serious repercussions for the party's future. It has shattered Hegde's image of invincibility. It has sharpened the conflict between the Vokkaligas and Lingayats on the one hand and backward castes on the other. And it has also exposed the rift between the original Kranti Ranga and Janata members: only eight of the 26 Rangaites attended the meeting at which the resignations were demanded.

More important, it has pushed Hegde into trying to play the Congress(I) game of defections, as evidenced by his press conference remarks. It is now common talk among Janata Party circles that they are seeking 10 Congress(I) defectors, and lists of names are being circulated freely. With this, the Janata Party wants to show the Congress(I) that it will not be toppled so easily. None of this has, however, stilled speculation on what the Congress(I) might do. The party has several options. One of them is to try and prop up Bangarappa who has, as usual, been trying to woo ex-Kranti Ranga men. But Urs and Sait will have nothing to do with him. Another is to try and form a grouping around Urs, to cash in on the old sentiment attached to the name. The Congress(I) is plagued on its part by the existence of three quarrelling factions led by Patil, Moily and former minister H. Srikantiah. These factions are unable to agree on a common leader, which is why the Centre may opt for a Srinagar type "operation topple", using a non-Congress(I) politician.

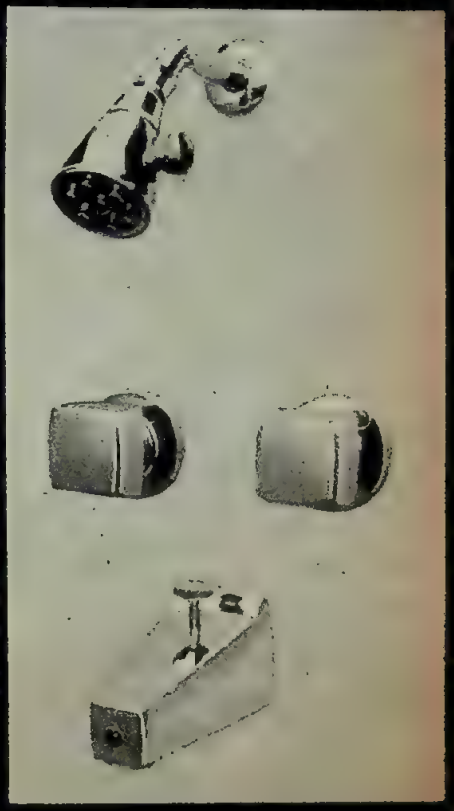
Whatever happens, Hegde has a tough time ahead of him. His support in the Assembly has been shrinking since January 1983, when he took over as the state's chief minister with the unconditional support of 136 MLA's in the 224-member assembly. Though he was able to attract two Congress (I) MLAS, he later lost the support of six Kranti Ranga MLAS who deserted him in June last year. Six months later, in December 1983, the five member Maharashtra Eleckaran Samiti withdraw support from the Hegde Government when it failed to come to an agreement with the Maharashtra Government on the border dispute between the two states. And two independent MLAS who had earlier pledged support to the Janata Party later opted in favour of the Congress (I). As a result, the Janata majority was reduced from 26 to 15, and Hegde's insecurity was heightened when the 18-member Bharatiya Janata Legislature Party converted its unconditional support to conditional support.

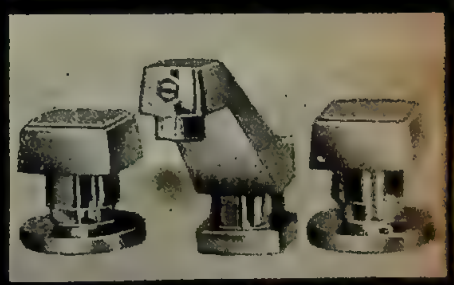
With these two resignations, Hegde is walking a tight rope, and has many hurdles to cross before the Lok Sabha poll later this year. His most immediate problem is, of course, staying in power if the Congress(I), which has launched several abortive bids to topple him, should see an opportunity in the Sait and Urs resignations and try for a repeat of the Jammu & Kashmir type operation. Events could move fast. Meanwhile Karnataka is without a proper council of ministers, Hegde is on the defensive, and the Janata Party is in the doldrums.

—PRABHU CHAWLA WITH
K. BHANUMATI in Bangalore

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

The Shah Show





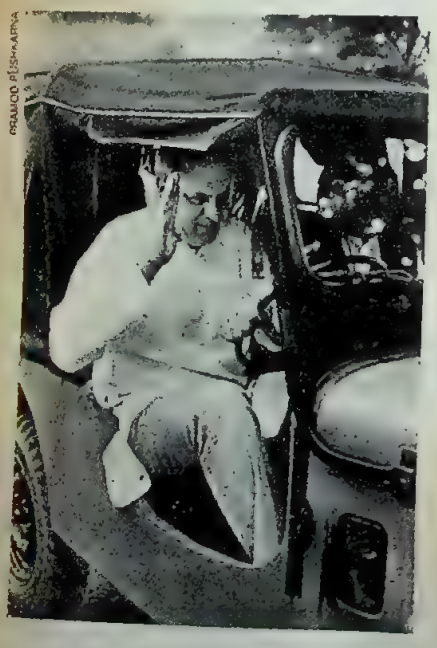
THE ON-GOING power struggle in Kashmir took yet another intriguing turn last fortnight. As the count-down for the crucial July 31, assembly session began, the two warring National Conference (NC) factions led by the ousted chief minister

Shah at Tral: going strong

Farooq Abdullah and his sister Khalida Shah were preparing themselves for a final showdown. While Farooq took his political battle to the streets and far-off villages, Khalida and her husband Chief Minister G.M. Shah stepped up their hunt for MLA's and succeeded in snatching two more thus raising the party's strength in the Assembly from 13 to 15. While Shah's supporters—including the Congress(I) legislators—rose to 42 in the 78-member assembly, Farooq's strength plummeted to 33 from 46. In addition, Shah was able to muster majority support in the 33-member upper house with more defections raising the strength to a total of 18, including the three Congress(I) members.

Khalida served a severe political blow to her brother when in a surprise move she was able to woo Ghulam Mohammad Bhadarwahi, senior vice-president of the Farooq-led NC and its only link with Sheikh's era. Bhadarwahi who spent over seven years in prison with Sheikh and was one of his senior cabinet colleagues till his death, deserted Farooq barely a week before the Assembly was to adopt a confidence motion in favour of Shah's 30-day-old cabinet. Said Bhadarwahi after his resignation: "After giving serious thought to the prevailing political situation, I am convinced that only G.M. Shah's Government can fulfil Sheikh's dreams and ideals."

Bhadarwahi was not the only addition to Shah's flock of MLA's. A day



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Farooq (left) and Khalida with son Muzzaffar (right): long battle ahead

later, Muzzaffar, the chief minister's son and his trouble-shooter, hammered yet another nail into Farooq's political coffin when he succeeded in persuading Rafiq Hussain Khan, to switch his loyalty to Sheikh Khan, a former minister and chief whip of the NC, was the prize catch . It was Khan, who in a letter to the Assembly speaker had demanded the expulsion of 15 NC MLA's responsible for the Farooq government's dismissal. The speaker referred his request to the Jammu & Kashmir High Court for its final opinion. But Farooq, aware of Khan's importance, had deputed Mohammed Shafi, a former minister, and two other MLA's to keep a 24-hour vigil on Khan's second floor room in the newly constructed MLAs' hostel. On July 22 when Khan defected, both Shafi and Farooq were virtually on guard duty. But Khan was too smart. When Shafi went out to make a phone call, Khan gave him the slip. Khan's statement supporting Shah's Government was handed over to a PTI stringer at midnight at his house.

When the court took up the case for hearing, the tables were turned on Farooq. Not only had Khan as complainant withdrawn his petition, he also withdrew the power of attorney which he had earlier signed in favour of former law minister P.L. Handoo to fight the case. Khan later justified his decision on the plea that Farooq didn't represent the majority view of the NC workers. Said Khan: "Expulsion of Farooq by the NC meeting presided over by Khalida has now been accepted by the rank and file".

The chief minister didn't confine himself to the game of defection. Seemingly perturbed by the massive public response Farooq was receiving—at one meeting at his party headquarters, he was inundated with offerings of food when he complained that he didn't have enough money to buy it—Shah alongwith his senior cabinet colleagues fanned out to the Congress(I) strongholds and other areas. Poor turnouts at his initial meetings failed to deter him and by the end of last fortnight the public meetings organised by the Congress(I) and the Khalida-led NC were attracting large crowds. The major thrust of his speeches was that the state had suffered badly due to Farooq's confrontation with the Centre. Said Shah in Kupwara: "People outside the state are being told that the Kashmiris are not with the new government. Those who are spreading these rumours should come and see the massive support my government has."

Shah naturally received strong support from the Congress(I) high command. Said Congress(I) general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad: "The people have rejected Farooq's anti-national politics and the Congress(I) will support Shah's government to the hilt."

ANTI-DEFECTION BILL

Legal Storm

JAMMU & Kashmir is the only Indian state with an anti-defection law. Significantly, the legislation was introduced into the state's constitution by Sheikh Abdullah in a bid to pre-empt mass defections from his party following the expulsion of Mirza Afzal Beg, the Sheikh's former protege and deputy chief minister. Though there was no real threat to the state Government at that time, the objective was to neutralise any future attempts by the ruling party at the Centre to encourage defections.

However, instead of introducing a new act, the Sheikh inserted a new Clause (24 G) in the state's People's Representative Act. The amendment stipulated that a person would be disqualified from being a member of the legislative assembly or council if he left the party on whose ticket he was elected or defied a party whip without prior approval of the party.

But even before the ink was dry on the new amendment, defections from the Sheikh's ruling National Conference (NC) party began with Malik Mohiud-din, speaker of the Assembly, quitting to join the Congress. Barely six months later, Mian Bashir, promptly invoked the anti-defection clause and had their assembly seats vacated.

Both defectors went to the state high court to challenge the constitutional validity of the anti-defection clause, and after a six-month battle, a full bench of the high court held the amendment valid but only by virtue of the casting vote. Chief Justice Mufti Bahud-din and Justice G.M. Mir came down in favour of the amendment. Justice A.S. Anand, now acting chief justice, and Justice I.K. Kotwal, both from the Jammu region, declared the amendment *ultra vires*. Following judicial precedent, the views of the seniormost judge prevailed.

But the court still insisted on issuing two separate judgements. While it held that Mohiud-din was not covered by the law because he was not a member of any party as a speaker of the House, the court held that Mian Bashir was disqualified from holding an assembly seat. Bashir, however, took the matter to the Supreme Court which stayed the high court ruling and also restrained Bashir from voting on any issue in the Assembly. Till date, the Supreme Court has not given its final judgement on the issue.

In the absence of any final verdict, the two warring NC groups are taking diametrically opposite legal views on the recent alleged defection of 15 NC MLA's to the parallel party headed by Khalida Shah. Says H.L. Bhagotra, a senior high court advocate who represented Shah's group in the court: "It is entirely a different question now. We are not dealing with an individual who has left a party and joined yet another. When a majority of party workers, and members declare themselves as the genuine party, one cannot call it defection. None of these 15 MLA's have joined any party against whom they fought." Retorts P.L. Handoo, the state's former law minister: "It is a clear question of defection. They are no more in a party on whose ticket they were elected."

With one-third of the NC MLA's and over 60 per cent of general council membership—nominated by Sheikh Abdullah—joining Shah, the entire case has taken a curious turn. Pro-Shah MLA's maintain that the question to be decided is: who is the NC—we or they? While the legal question may be settled by the high court, the final verdict about which is the genuine NC will be settled only during the next assembly election. —PRABHU CHAWLA

Crowd awaits verdict outside court



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

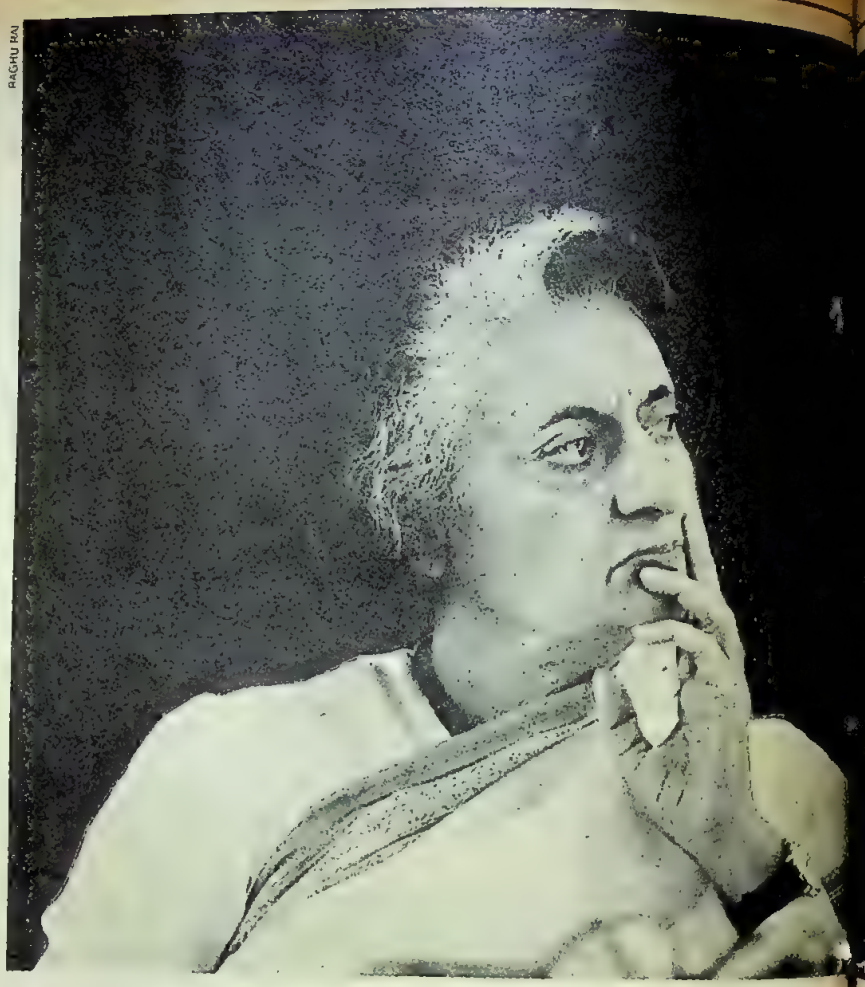
port from the Congress(I) in consolidating his hold over the state's politics. Both Mufti Mohammed Syed, the J&K Pradesh Congress Committee president and Maulvi Iftikhar Hussain Ansari addressed over a dozen big public meetings in various parts of the valley. Crowed Syed: "We want to dispel Farooq's propaganda that the Congress(I) can't face the people. What we can't do is to organise anti-national rallies and get people killed for petty political gains."

Though Farooq was not all that lonely, he was finding it difficult to sustain the public outcry which his dismissal had generated since July 2. Soon after the massive Martyr's Day procession on July 16, Farooq's public meetings outside Srinagar were thinly attended as compared to his early public meetings organised at a very short notice. Surprisingly, district office-bearers nominated by him were developing cold feet and balked at mobilising people for Farooq's visits. Said Farooq: "I am not worried about those who want to stay with me for power. Even if Farooq is left alone, he will continue to fight like a tiger." Farooq has given a call for complete bandh on August 31 to be followed with dharnas, demonstrations and civil disobedience at the district and tehsil level. Farooq and his supporters were pinning their hopes on the national opposition parties to take their fight to the rest of the country. The entire Opposition, in fact, walked out of the Lok Sabha on the first day of the monsoon session when Speaker Balram Jakhar turned down their plea for a discussion on the dismissal of Farooq's government in J & K.

While the slanging match between the two groups continued, a few family well-wishers and anti-Congress(I) Kashmiri politicians were actively engaged in trying to bring about some rapprochement between Farooq and Shah. Led by a top businessman of the valley, the main objective is to wean Shah away from the Congress(I), which they felt was against Kashmir's independent identity. While Farooq maintained a cryptic silence on his reconciliatory talks, Shah, while addressing a public meeting at Pattan, admitted that he had received certain feelers from Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq, chief of the Awami Action Committee, Mohammed Syed Masoodi, convenor of the now disbanded state Janata Party and Syed Mir Qasim for settling the family dispute. But he ruled out any possibility of a compromise, and the battle for the NC seemed a long way from over.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

RAGHU RAI



UNION CABINET

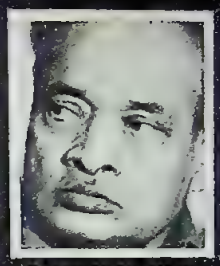
The Shuffle Strategy

UNION Cabinet reshuffles used to be big news, but not any more. Last fortnight when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reshuffled her cabinet for the twelfth time since January 1980, it caused only minor ripples in the national political scene. No heads rolled, nor were the loyalists rewarded. P.V. Narasimha Rao the foreign minister for four years, was moved out of South Block into North Block as the home minister. P.C. Sethi, the incumbent home minister, replaced S.B. Chavan as the planning minister, his fourth cabinet assignment in as many years. Chavan stayed on in South Block as minister without portfolio, to assist the prime minister in foreign affairs.

So abrupt were the changes that even the affected ministers were taken by surprise. When Mrs Gandhi boarded the Indian Air Force plane on her three-day sojourn, none of her cabinet colleagues were aware of the impending changes. While Sethi was in Indore, his home constituency, Chavan was packing to leave for an official southern trip. Rao was studying Foreign Ministry files, preparing for the approaching Parliament session. Within hours of landing in Hyderabad, Mrs Gandhi got President Zail Singh's approval for the Cabinet changes and the news was immediately conveyed to New Delhi over the prime minister's hot line.

Quite predictably, the Congress(I) welcomed the move, while opposition parties termed it as insignificant and without any purpose. Kamlapati Tripathi, the ageing Congress(I) working president, said: "Only Mrs Gandhi can do right things at the right time." He was not

Mrs Gandhi needed someone who could effectively counter the expected opposition onslaught on the Government's inept handling of the Punjab problem.



Narasimha Rao



P.C. Sethi



S.B. Chavan

off the mark. The monsoon session of Parliament was to begin four days later on June 23 and Mrs Gandhi needed someone who could effectively counter the expected opposition onslaught on the Government's inept handling of the Punjab problem. Anti-Sethi forces within the ruling party cited many of Sethi's gaffes like his statements on amending Article 25 of the Constitution, entry of security forces into gurudwaras and his untimely disclosures on the Punjab parleys to discredit him. Mrs Gandhi also seems to have been convinced that Sethi would not be an effective spokesman on domestic problems during the elections.

Though Sethi's supporters claim otherwise, his ouster seems to have been precipitated by his outburst against the Madhya Pradesh Government. Addressing a public meeting in Indore on July 18, he ordered the local officials not to implement the state Government's decision of conferring ownership rights to jhuggi dwellers living on public and private land. The next day Chief Minister Arjun Singh met the prime minister in New Delhi and 24 hours later Sethi was relieved of the home portfolio.

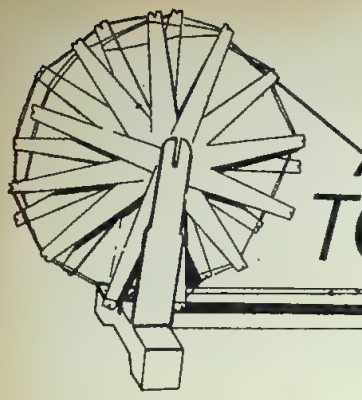
Sethi says he met the prime minister to explain his position in the Indore incident before she left for Hyderabad, but she did not discuss the cabinet reshuffle. His supporters assert that Sethi was only a home minister by proxy and had never gone beyond the brief handed over to him by the prime minister's secretariat. Said Sethi: "My transfer has nothing to do with Punjab problem which was handled very satisfactorily under the direct leadership of the prime minister. It is entirely the prime minister's prerogative to assign any department to any of her cabinet colleagues."

Mrs Gandhi chose Rao for the sensitive home portfolio because he has been involved in the affairs of Punjab, Assam and Jammu & Kashmir for the last few months. In fact his name has been suggested at every reshuffle since 1980 but the prime minister retained him for projecting India's image abroad. Though there have been no records of spectacular diplomatic initiatives undertaken, Rao has been handling the foreign office with grace and skill. With Mrs Gandhi increasingly undertaking major foreign forays, Rao's area of operations has been shrinking. As chairperson of the Non-aligned Movement, she has been handling a major chunk of diplomatic correspondence and a special NAM cell has been created under her to coordinate these activities. After the successful holding of CHOGM in New Delhi in 1983, Mrs Gandhi has been maintaining direct contact with the heads of these countries. With a very important section of the foreign office working under her supervision, Rao's talent has not been fully utilised. Said a senior foreign official: "Mr Rao was handling more domestic problems than foreign relations." A Congress(I) MP added: "With his cool temperament Rao is more suitable for solving the growing problems at home rather than doing pep talk at international conferences."

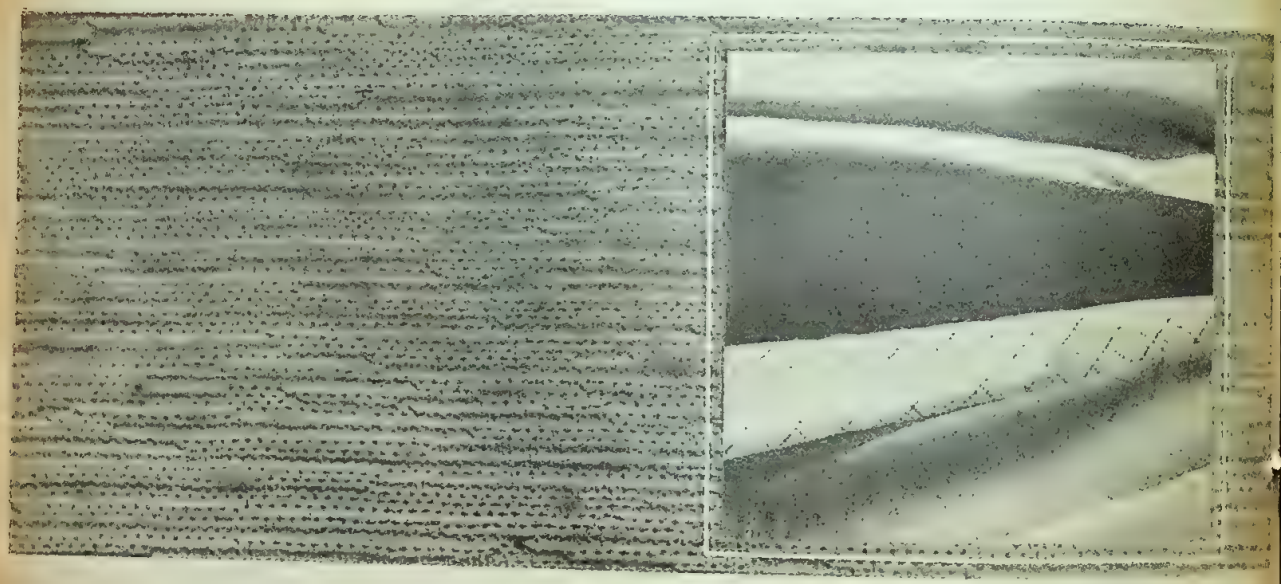
Of the three changes, it is Chavan's transfer from Yojana Bhawan which defies all plausible explanation. During the last two years, Chavan not only successfully implemented the Sixth Five-Year Plan but also was instrumental in the timely preparation of the Seventh Five-Year Plan. Known as a tough and principled politician, Chavan succeeded in disciplining states which were demanding additional assistance without generating their own internal resources. Last year he withheld payment of over Rs 500 crore of planned assistance to states like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh because they were unable to raise their targetted sources. According to party insiders, Chavan was asked to vacate Yojana Bhawan to accommodate Sethi who could not be given any other department. Chavan with his socialist image can help Mrs Gandhi to deal more effectively with the socialist countries.

Mrs Gandhi by this insignificant reshuffle has belied the hopes of many within her party who were expecting her to make such changes that would help the party fight the coming elections more effectively. It was believed that she would sack either the Railway Minister Ghani Khan Chowdhury or his junior colleague C.K. Jaffer Sharief. It was also rumoured that Vidhya Charan Shukla, Krishan Chand Pant, K. Brahmananda Reddy and Y.B. Chavan would be inducted into the Cabinet to give it more representation and a broader base. But this time Mrs Gandhi has chosen to depend on her own intuition and judgement.

—PRABHU CHAWLA



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MAHARASHTRA

A Temporary Truce



IN A MANNER which has become all too familiar, the ruling party in Maharashtra went through one of its periodic bouts of blood-letting when it was on the verge of a split and then, just as abruptly, the warring factions declared a temporary truce last fortnight. The mild-mannered Union Commerce Minister V.P. Singh was rushed down to Bombay ostensibly to provide the healing touch in a squabble between Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and aggrieved dissidents who claimed they had been ignored in spite of their die-hard loyalty to the party.

After two days of hectic parleys held with loyalist rebels such as Babasaheb Bhosale, Ramrao Adik and A.R. Antulay as well as pro-Patil people, Singh triumphantly declared that he had achieved "not a temporary truce, but a permanent settlement". He certainly went about his task of peacemaking with a great deal of earnestness, trying to patch up differences with aplomb. The consensus that emerged after the peace deliberations (now enshrined as the "70:30" formula) was that in future all positions to statutory committees, boards and corporations will be filled in the ratio of 70 loyalists or late-comers to 30 Patil men, who loyalists consider outsiders.

In addition a six-member co-ordination committee was formed consisting of the chief minister and two of his people. To counterbalance Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee-I (MPCC-I) President N.M. Kamble and two of his organisational nominees will decide all grievances, since the high command in Delhi is tired of receiving delegations from Maharashtra. Patil can hardly be elated about running a consensus government, but as a sop to him, Singh clearly stressed that Patil was here to stay and there was no question of dislodging him.

More than V.P. Singh's 70: 30 formula it was the minor cabinet reshuffle in Delhi which has had a salutory effect on party dissidence. The fact that Maharashtra Minister S.B. Chavan was removed from Planning and rendered without a portfolio fuelled rumours that he was being kept in readiness to take over as chief minister of the state. Speculation of Chavan's return had a cementing effect on old enemies Patil and Antulay, who obviously decided that they should gang up against a common foe.

A surprise meeting between the two was followed by a statement from Patil: "Antulay and I have agreed to work in concert to avoid misunderstanding. We have decided to telephone each other—the moment any problem crops up." Antulay reciprocated the newly developed friendship sentiments.

The fresh round of squabbling started this month soon after Patil reshuffled his cabinet taking away better portfolios from some known dissident ministers such as Satish Pednekar and Chandrakant Tripathi and giving his own men like Sudhakar Naik increased responsibility. Though it turned out to be a minor reshuffle, it was enough to put the loyalists on the warpath. Former chief ministers Antulay and Bhosale and ex-deputy chief minister Ramrao Adik dashed off a two-page telegram to the prime minister demanding Patil's removal. "How long can we remain helpless? We sit silent and watch the destruction of our very own home which gave them political shelter," they stated in the telegram. The signatories warned Mrs Gandhi that "Maharashtra is lost to you because of the chief minister's conspiracies against you and the loyalists".

Patil's reaction was to dub the telegram-writers with the colourful Marathi phrase: *Vithal geyla bayke* which translated means his detractors had reached the menopausal age. That set off a stormy reaction not just from the signatories but from several women's groups and feminists including Mrinal Gore and Pramila Dandavate who demanded that the chief minister apologise for implying that women after menopause lose their vitality and looks.

The dissidents in the meantime came forward with a counter conspiracy reinforcing that they could not be yet put out to pasture. Just as the voting for the deputy-chairman of the Legislative Council was to take place, a Congress(I) whip discovered that 17 out of the 36 Congress MLC's were missing, including Adik, Baburao Kale and Gulabrao Patil. The Congress would have faced an embarrassing defeat in the House but for the help of the three Shiv Sena legislators, who at the urging of the Congress(I) abstained from voting. That the Shiv

Sena had extracted its price was clear when that same evening the Sena leader Madhukar V. Sarpotdar was released —he had been detained under the NSA for his role in the recent Bombay riots.

Bhosale admitted that the mass-scale absenteeism by legislators had been pre-planned but that no harm was meant to come to the party since six Congress(I) MLC's were waiting in the lobby and would have come to the rescue if the Shiv Sena had not obliged. While the leaders traded charges the camp followers did likewise: legislators Baburao Bhapse and B.A. Desai demanded that action be taken against the missing 17, while six other legislators led by Nirmal Thokal described Desai and Bhapse as "jokers and political upstarts".

Meanwhile, on July 18 when Bhosale was being driven to the assembly hall by his son, his car was halted by over 30 youths brandishing umbrellas. Since the demonstrators were shouting "Indira Gandhi zindabad" Bhosale as well as the police were temporarily misled before they found the group banging on the car window panes. Thirty two men were arrested by the police and an inquiry ordered.

The attack on Bhosale seemed a well-planned one since the demonstrators had come in vehicles from Jogeshwari, Malabar Hill and Andheri. Some of them were found to have police records as slum landlords and black marketeers while two were allegedly involved in an attempted murder. Subhash Maykar and Kishan Jadhav, the two men who were arrested, are minor functionaries in local units of the Bombay Youth Congress(I). Said Bhosale: "I hope this does not mean the beginning of goonda raj in the state."

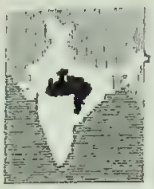
The Bhosale attack figured prominently in the Assembly with the Opposition led by Sharad Pawar demanding an adjournment while the Deputy Speaker Shankarrao Jagtap tried to play down the incident. Among the few Congressmen to come out strongly in the matter was Bhaurao Patil who charged that "people in power have a hand in this."

But by the week end the attack on Bhosale, the abusive telegram and the "Menopausal Madness" exchanges had all been forgotten. In the new mood of conciliation Patil asked instead for a major cabinet expansion by mid-August which he indicated would include a fair share of dissidents. Said Patil: "I have decided to ignore criticism levelled against me. In this election year we cannot afford to fight among ourselves."

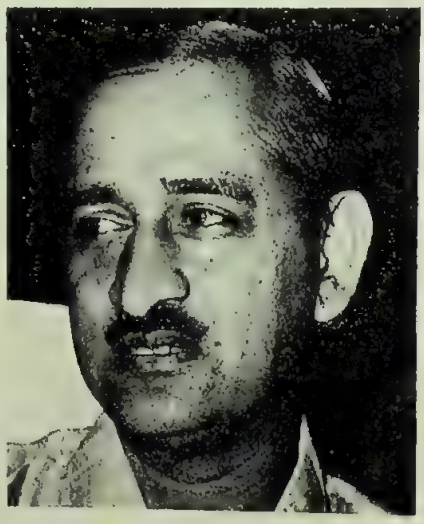
—COOMI KAPOOR

MADHYA PRADESH

Suspense Drama



VERY FEW political parties can afford the luxury of suspending former chief ministers from their ranks in an election year. But in suspending ex-Madhya Pradesh chief minister Virendra Kumar Saklecha last fortnight, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) really had very little option. Saklecha's recent frontal attack on party colleague and leader of the Opposition, Sunderlal Patwa, was an affront the party could hardly ignore considering that the broadsides were launched in a public forum. In a press conference at Bhopal, Saklecha announced dramatically that he was quitting the party executive and the BJP legislature party because he felt that the party was being too "soft" towards the Congress (I) leadership. The charge clearly concerned Patwa since it was only giving public voice to a whisper campaign against Patwa that has been in the air for some months. More serious was the fact that the campaign hinted that Patwa was working in collusion with state Congress (I) chief minister, Arjun Singh. The BJP is a party that has traditionally maintained a tight lid on inner dissensions and Saklecha's charge was clearly intolerable. But even so, it must have been a painful decision. Saklecha has been with the party since its inception and his absence will certainly harm the party's prospects in the coming poll in a state in which it is the main opposition party with over 60 MLA's in a house of 321.



Saklecha: pawn in the play?

But the Saklecha-Patwa feud is hardly new and dates back to 1978 when the former was the chief minister. Both come from the opium-growing district of Mandsaur and have been political foes for years. Patwa was at the forefront of a campaign to unseat Saklecha from chief ministership. Though Saklecha actually resigned in 1979 over his son's role in a housing auction in New Delhi, he has never forgiven Patwa and the party leadership for pressurising him into stepping down.

However, Saklecha's suspension last fortnight is clearly cause for great worry as far as the party is concerned. A few days before his suspension, Sakharam Patel, a BJP MLA known to be close to Saklecha quit the party to join the Congress (I). The possibility of others following suit cannot be ruled out. Hamid Quereshi, BJP leader in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly has already expressed surprise over Saklecha's suspension and Saklecha himself is known to have a strong following among the younger party MLA's though it is unlikely that they will be in any mood to defy the party leadership at this crucial stage.

But the main beneficiary of the Saklecha affair is the state's wily chief minister Arjun Singh who is widely believed to have orchestrated the events that led up to Saklecha's suspension. In fact, Arjun Singh had pushed Saklecha to the wall by relentlessly pursuing the case registered against Saklecha for having assets disproportionate to his income through the state economic offenses wing. Saklecha has been accused of amassing Rs 57.61 lakh in a case (INDIA TODAY, June 30, 1984) described as the biggest ever involving a former chief minister. Singh has also added more fuel to the fire by cultivating Patwa with unconcealed ardour to encourage the rumours that Patwa was cosying up to the ruling party. Patwa was afforded ministerial status and given a car and ministerial staff, a move that only spurred Saklecha in his anti-Patwa campaign.

The chief minister obviously has other similar cards up his sleeve. He is reported to be secretly wooing Pawan Diwan, a former minister from Chattisgarh. But at the moment, with the Congress (I) having won 320 of the 385 seats in the recent panchayat elections and his main opposition threat on the run, Arjun Singh is laughing all the way to the vote bank.

—RAJU SANTHANAM



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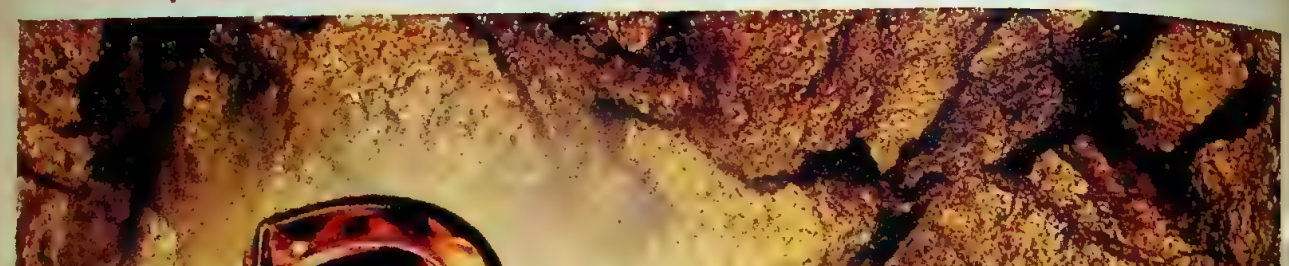
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Bloody Feud



THE UNIVERSITY College of Engineering at Burla in Orissa's Sambalpur district is not exactly the most peaceful of educational institutions. But even by its standards, the events of last fortnight were shocking beyond all comprehension.

The incident started on a menacing note with a group of 200 students from the college marching out of the hostel armed with petrol bombs and other lethal weapons. Crossing the bridge that divides the campus from the township, they entered the market, deserted because of the unusual hour—4.30 a.m. Soon there were loud explosions and some shops burst into flames. Suddenly a siren went off and the students rushed back in panic only to find the bridge blocked by a posse of policemen. Behind them were a group of traders armed with iron rods.

Some of the local people had heard the sound of tear-gas shells and gunshots, but nobody actually paid much heed to the incident till two days after the altercation when 10 decomposed bodies were fished out from the Mahanadi channel which flows under the bridge. The bodies were identified as those of students, and three other students were still missing.

The recovery of the bodies sent shock waves throughout the state. All the corpses had wounds on their heads and faces and it brought back unpleasant memories of the violent anti-trader agitation of 1980. However, the July 14 incident was clearly the culmination of the long-standing hostility between the engineering students and the traders of Burla. "The engineering students had unleashed a reign of terror in the township and had lost the sympathy of the local population. Everybody, specially the poor businessmen, were terror-struck and fed up with the situation," says Ramesh Nanda, president of the Burla Traders Association. The traders deny any association with the crime, and claim that the students panicked when they found their escape routes blocked and jumped into the Mahanadi and drowned.

The traders also allege that the students of the college are controlled by a group called Navagrah (nine stars), consisting of nine students led by Dilip Patnaik, son of a deputy superintendent of police who had pressurised the local police not to entertain complaints by the traders. Patnaik, an ex-student, was once expelled and fined for misbehaviour. Two months ago, he was stabbed in an altercation with some criminals.





The University College of Engineering (top) and a looted shop in Burla

The provocation for the July 14 killings was sparked off when a local, Mahesh Aggarwal, was abused by Patnaik and his cronies at an unlicensed liquor shop. In the ensuing scuffle, Aggarwal was assaulted and lodged a complaint with the police. Some students were arrested but soon let off, allegedly at the instigation of Patnaik. This angered the traders who shut down their shops for three days in protest and also sent a delegation to the collector to highlight their complaints against the students and seek protection.

Student leaders, however, claim that the traders had hired toughs to beat up students. They claim that at 2 a.m. on July 14, a truckload of toughs raided the hostel and challenged the students to come out. The police, being party to the conspiracy, blocked the bridge and the toughs then caught the students, beat them up and threw them off the bridge.

While there is obviously some truth in their account considering the unusual hour when the students went on the rampage, the incident has assumed the proportion of a major political issue. Four students from the Navagrah, including Dilip Patnaik, have been arrested along with 38 others. Nineteen traders have also been taken into custody.

Sensing that the Opposition would capitalise on the issue, Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik quickly ordered a court of inquiry under a retired high court judge and also ordered the closure of all educational institutions. The Opposition reacted by orchestrating a bandh in Sambalpur district against the "inaction, inefficiency, and complicity of the administration" and students formed an action committee to spearhead an agitation. Since this is an election year, the incident is sure to become a political issue in the coming months.

—FARZAND AHMED in Burla

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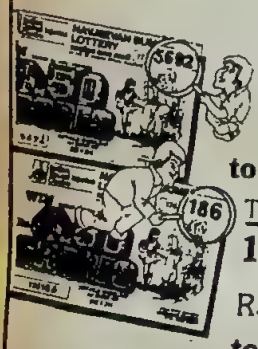
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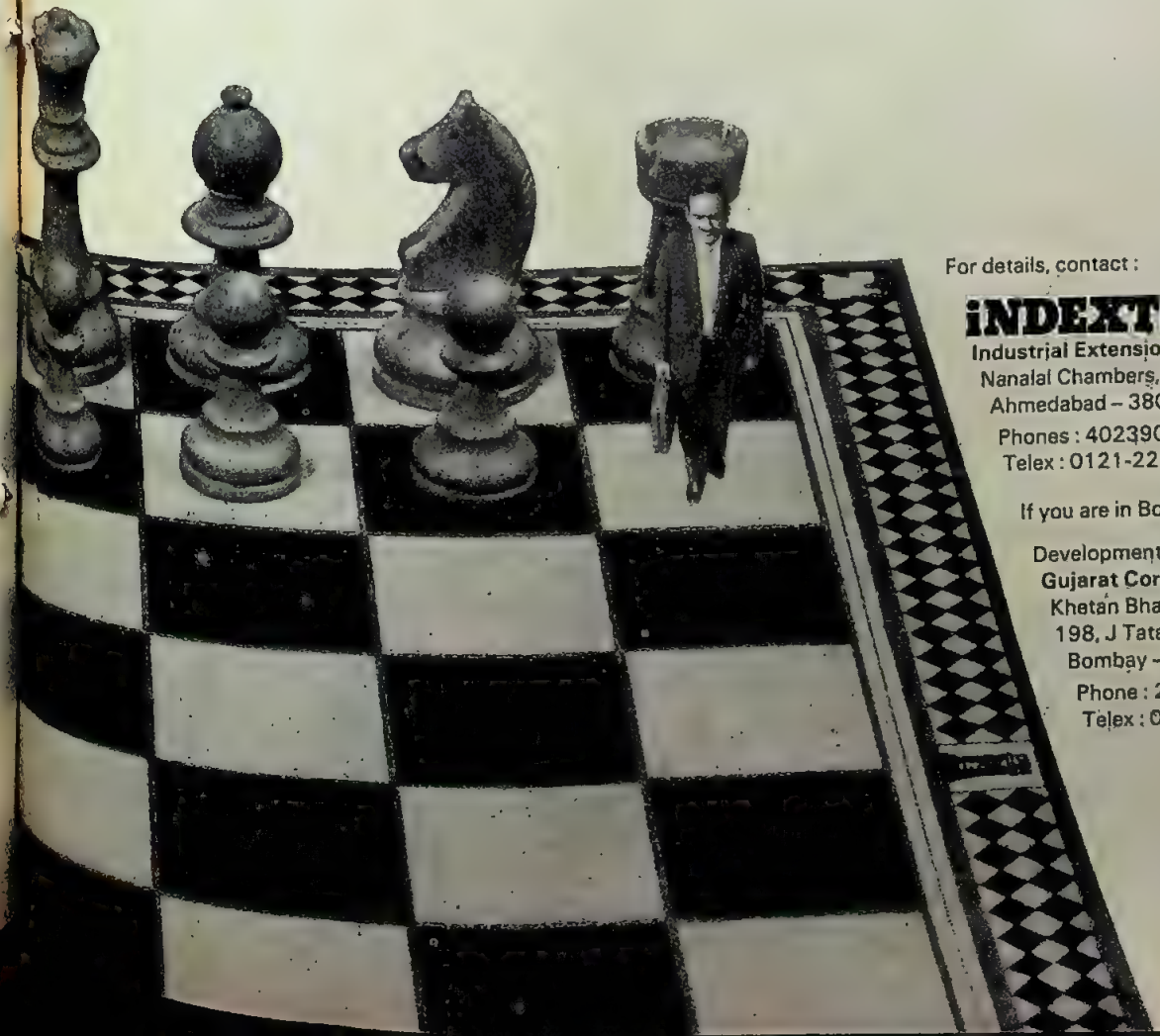
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Voters at Howrah polls

WEST BENGAL

Electoral Dilemma



THE LEFT Front in West Bengal these days is like a business cartel confronted by a shrinking market. With the Congress(I) steadily eating into its votes, the Front partners face the dilemma of how to allocate pro-left votes amongst themselves. The exercise is all the more complicated by the recent election trends which point to an eclipse of the smaller Front parties like the Forward Bloc (FB), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The reluctance of the smaller Front members to accept the realities is proving to be particularly galling to the CPI-M, the dominant Front party. The first inkling of a shift in electoral preferences in favour of the Congress(I) at the cost of smaller leftist parties was noticeable in the 1983 panchayat polls. The Howrah municipal elections held recently only confirmed the trend: out of the 18 seats contested by the smaller Front parties only two were retained. The CPI-M contested 32 seats and won 28 of them. Voicing the dissatisfaction of his party, the Secretary of the CPI's Howrah district committee, Naresh Dasgupta observed that the Front as a whole would have fared better had the other members not insisted on a disproportionate share of seats—18—instead of the 12 initially suggested by the CPI-M.

The CPI-M is apprehensive about the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections and feels it cannot afford to give up more than the barest minimum of seats to its Front partners in the state. According to party analysts, the contest against the Congress(I) for a number of parliamentary seats this time will be particularly tough, and chances are that the CPI-M may not be able to retain all of its 28 Lok Sabha seats (out of a total of 42) in the state. The national leadership of the CPI-M is keen on winning a few extra seats from outside the state; but West Bengal is a bastion the party has to preserve if it wants to retain its foothold in national politics. Hence the West Bengal unit of the CPI-M wants to marginally decrease the allocation of seats to its Front partners.

Yet the CPI-M cannot afford to disenchant its partners and thereby isolate itself. The Chairman of the Left Front and CPI-M leader Saroj Mukherjee ex-



Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee: changing strategy

The CPI(M) cannot afford to give up more than the minimum of seats to its Front partners in the state.





(Left) FB's Ashok Ghosh and RSP's Mitra: standing firm



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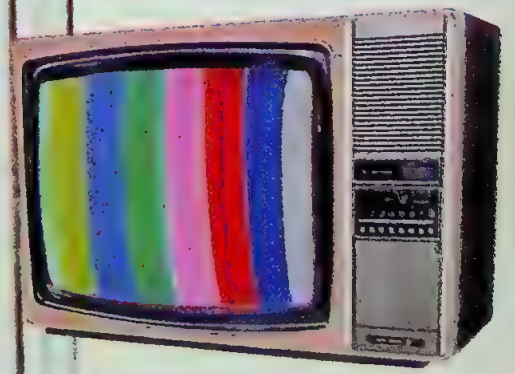
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explained to INDIA TODAY that "some Left Front members do not seem to realise there has been a change in the objective conditions in the state, with the Congress(I) having risen to a position where it constitutes a real threat to the Left Front". To contain the Congress(I), Mukherjee argued, it is absolutely necessary for all the Left Front members to fight the elections on the basis of "realistic assessments of their individual strengths". This implies that given the election trends, the smaller partners should contest fewer seats and extend support to the CPI-M instead of vice versa.

But the other front partners show no willingness to stand down from any of the seats they had contested in the last Lok Sabha polls. The CPI in particular has reacted sharply to the CPI-M's suggestion that it give up one out of the three Lok Sabha seats it holds at present. "We have no intention of withdrawing Narain Chaubey from the Kharagpur constituency," said CPI leader Kamlapathi Roy. The CPI-M contends that the CPI has only seven assembly seats and does not warrant three Lok Sabha seats. "The Midnapore district committee of our party is demanding that we put up our own candidate instead of continuing to support Chaubey," said the Left Front chairman. And the CPI-M's Midnapore district committee members want their own candidate because they fear the party might lose the Lok Sabha seat from the Jhargram constituency in Midnapore.

The CPI-M is also alarmed at the demand made by the West Bengal Socialist Party for two seats. "If they make unrealistic demands, there will be problems," warns Saroj Mukherjee. The Socialist Party leader, Biman Mitra, on the other hand, contends that the Contai Lok Sabha seat is rightfully theirs and that the CPI-M had won because of Socialist support. All the three assembly seats bagged by the Socialists are also from Contai. The other seat the Socialists want to contest is the traditional stronghold of the Congress in north-west Calcutta. Mitra contests the charge that the other Front partners' strength had declined. "What is the barometer by which a particular party's strength can be gauged," he asks, echoing a sentiment shared by all the other smaller Left Front constituents.

The RSP and the FB have not made any strident claims lately, perhaps because of their disastrous showing in the recent Howrah polls—both lost all the eight seats they contested for in the area. Moreover, the FB candidate had barely scraped through in the last Shibpur by-elections to the assembly. At the same time, all the FB leaders are quite vocal in asserting that the Left Front would not have fared any better in Howrah had it been allowed to field more candidates. Privately, FB members blame the CPI-M for not campaigning for them in Howrah while admitting at the same time that their grassroots organisation is in a shambles in many places.

The tendency for party workers to function in a partisan manner instead of working for the Front as a whole is noticeable in many parts of the state. In Cooch Behar district, CPI-M workers refused to bow down to the demands of the FB during last year's panchayat polls and both parties contested independently; the result was a shattering defeat for the FB.

All these differences are still undercurrents and leaders of the different Front parties do not exactly wish that they surface lest the Congress(I) take advantage of them. The CPI-M's task has become all the more difficult as it appears bent on cornering more pro- left votes without breaking up the cartel it has created with the smaller left parties.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

WEST BENGAL

Union Outrage

THE DEATH of Torabhai Dhamangamwala, a Gujarati trader of Calcutta's Burrabazar area who was allegedly beaten to death by some violent trade unionists could have passed off as just another casualty in a fight between employers and unions. But there was a difference in the traders' bandh protesting the death that followed: it was directed not only against the unions but also against unions in general. Caught in the middle was the Congress(I) MLA from Burrabazar, Rajesh Khaitan, who had spearheaded the agitations. He was promptly castigated by Ravi Shanker Pandey, the former Janata MLA from the area. "Khaitan has used this opportunity to crush trade unionism in Burrabazar and further his mafia activities," fumed Pandey.

Both Khaitan and Pandey profess to be battling against the evils in Burrabazar and both have sought police help. Illustrating the area's plight, a senior police officer says: "Everything is settled with money in



Khaitan

Both Khaitan and Pandey profess to be battling against the evils in Burrabazar and both have sought police help.



Pandey

against local politicians and the many antisocials operating in the area.

Torabhai's death occurred soon after the leftist South Burrabazar Shop Employees' Union led by Milon Dasgupta began demonstrating for the reinstatement of two sacked employees. At some stage the demonstrators seem to have assaulted Torabhai and his son. The union claimed Torabhai died of a heart attack, but everybody else including his sons maintained that he was murdered. Eleven trade unionists were arrested in connection with the death.

Other trade unions then jumped into the fray in a preventive action to try and stop any public backlash Burrabazar. The police do not look into complaints, the labour inspectors don't visit the shops, tax officials rarely check the books and even the Minimum Wages Act is flouted here."

Burrabazar has a profusion of unions which are controlled by musclemen who extort money from the traders, run satta dens, traffic in illicit liquor and indulge blatantly in illegal construction. Now, with the Congress(I) threatening to make a big issue of Torabhai's death and the state Government reportedly having asked the traders to dissociate themselves from political activity, the steaming cauldron that is Burrabazar seems all set to boil over.

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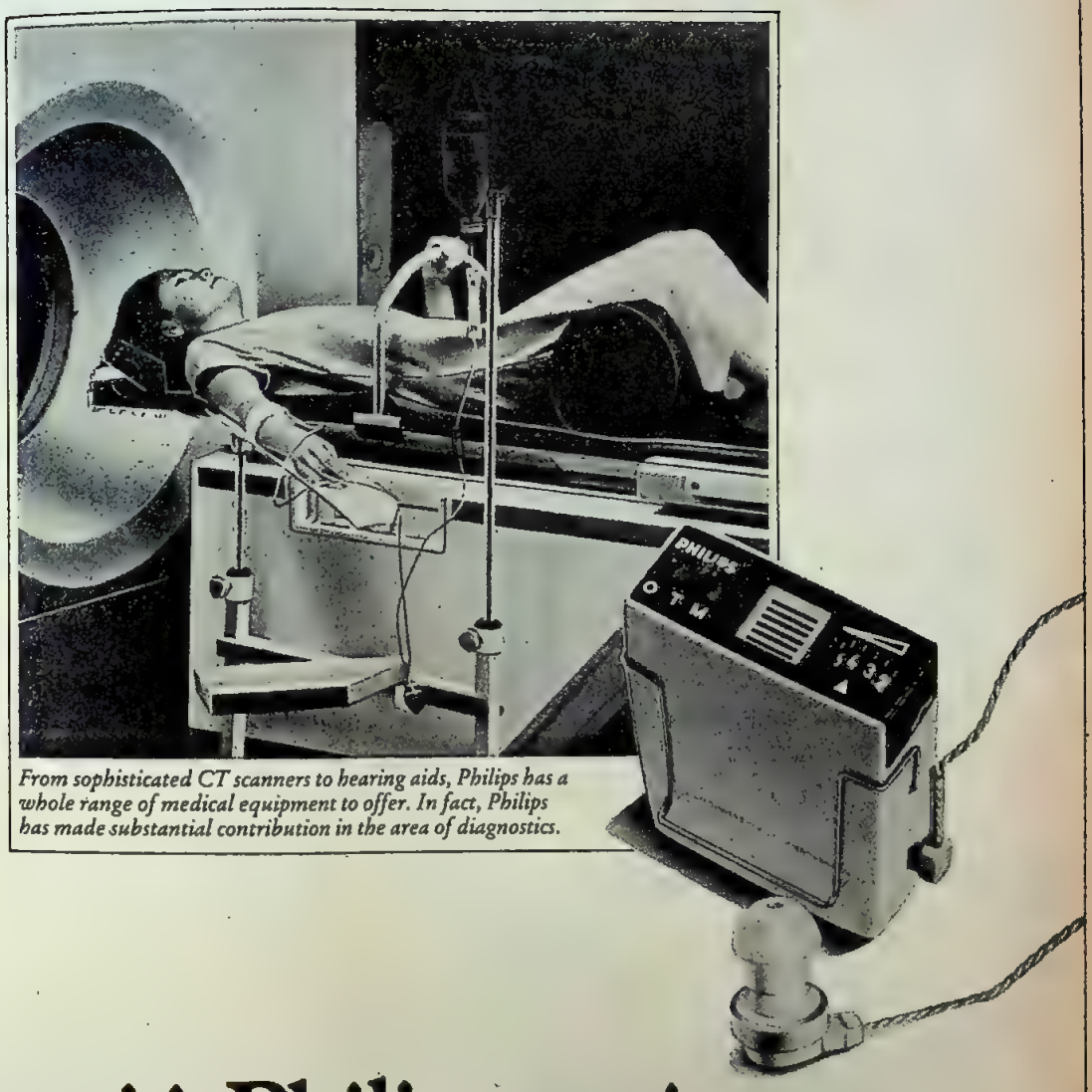


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KERALA

Patching Up



PUTTING aside their differences, the battle-scarred veterans of the Congress(I) in Kerala were last fortnight hesitantly pulling out faded olive branches for one of the periodic truces that mark the visits of Mrs Gandhi to the state. The prime minister had come for the inauguration of the Southern Air Command, the fifth operational command, of the Indian Air Force, at Trivandrum. She had been preceded by her trouble-shooter K. Moopanar, Congress(I) general secretary, who made a surprise visit to Cochin to see ex-chief minister A.K. Antony.

For the last two years, ever since the merger of his party with the Congress(I), Antony has been in the political shadows. Chief Minister Karunakaran and his men spared no opportunity to humiliate him and even denied him the KPCC(I) presidentship, which was a part of the merger deal. Antony and his men, says a sympathiser, were never taken into confidence by Karunakaran, who stage-managed everything with the help of his protégé and KPCC(I) President C.V. Padmarajan. These two filled the district committees with their own men and also gave choice corporation chairmanships to them. Even Home Minister Vayalar Ravi was side-lined with senior police officials reporting directly to Karunakaran.

By promising seats in Parliament to powerful Youth Congress supporters of Antony like T. Radhakrishan, M. Murali and Cheriyan Philip, Karunakaran convinced them to switch their loyalties to him. That Karunakaran and Antony are not on the best of terms is obvious. Said a minister who supports Antony: "When Karunakaran was hunted out of office by the Rajan case, Antony, who became chief minister provided him with a car. Today the very same Karunakaran who speeds around in his Benz cars refuses to provide Antony a car." Adds V.M. Sudheeran, MLA and Antony loyalist: "For the last 18 months Antony has been in political hibernation. Karunakaran and his men due to their actions have woken a sleeping giant."

The present troubles of the Congress(I) first began in its student wing, the Kerala Students Union (KSU). P.T. Thomas, KSU president and an



RAJAN POTHUVAL/MATHRUBHUMI

Mrs Gandhi with A.K. Antony (left) in Trivandrum: temporary truce

Antony man, was to be replaced by Karunakaran's follower Joseph Vazhakkal. At the time of the merger it was agreed that Thomas would step down after two years, but Thomas refused to budge. At a students meet in Calicut Vazhakkal's men were beaten up by supporters of Thomas, which further infuriated Karunakaran. Vazhakkal feels that Antony is using the KSU organisation as a bargaining counter.

Even though Antony had obliquely supported the candidature of Vazhakkal because of the agreement at the time of the merger, he changed his mind suddenly and refused to support it. His reversal is attributed to his desire to take over the reigns of the KPCC(I) again as he has been in the wilderness too long and his charisma has been substantially eroded. Antony, the Hamlet of Kerala politics, seemed to have finally decided to take up cudgels on behalf of his supporters and get even with Karunakaran.

His action had the desired effect, with Moopanar and Mrs Gandhi rushing to Kerala. Antony talked without aides to Mrs Gandhi for almost an hour. With the parliamentary elections imminent, Mrs Gandhi is supposed to have agreed to all his demands. When contacted, Antony told INDIA TODAY: "I am happy she came all the way to Trivandrum in spite of pressing national issues. I am happy and contented after our talks." He refused to say more. But it is understood from sources close to him that Mrs Gandhi will ask Karunakaran to consult Antony on all major issues and that his men be given the same importance as Karunakaran's numerous supporters.

It is also said that Antony will be made the KPCC(I) president before the parliamentary elections. M.P. Gangadharan, the Congress(I) irrigation minister who is steeped in scandal, is expected to be removed as part of the deal. Antony's men are thirsting for the blood of Gangadharan, who is Karunakaran's blue-eyed boy. Antony men also say that if P.T. Thomas, the KSU president is to be removed then G. Karthikeyan, the Youth Congress president, should also be replaced.

Meanwhile the Congress(I) in Kerala has started its preparation for the parliamentary elections and hectic activity is under way in the state capital. Two separate lists of candidates are being made by Padmarajan and Antony and both are being rushed to Delhi for the high command's approval. It looks like another long battle is imminent between the rival groups in Kerala after the temporary truce. Said a political observer: "This time it is going to be a fight to the bloody end that may see the birth of another regional Congress party."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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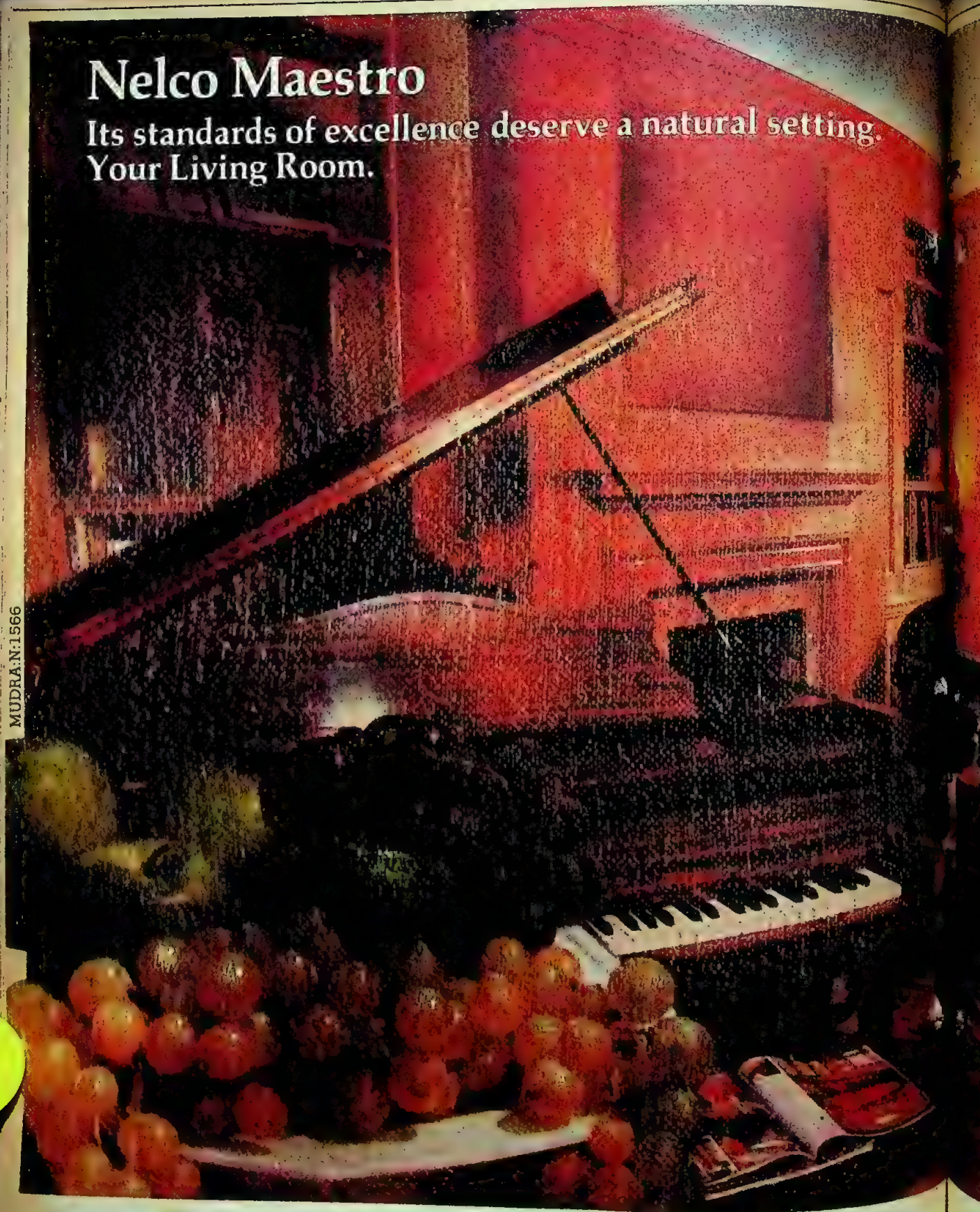
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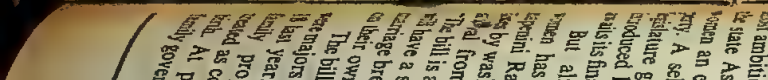


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Rama Rao with Medak voters

ANDHRA PRADESH

Wooing Women



WOMEN have always played a major role in Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's life—his political life, that is. Women voters have flocked en masse behind his saffron banner and after becoming chief minister he has continued to woo them with unconcealed ardour, mainly through myriad schemes and programmes meant to improve their lot. Late last month, yet another scheme, his most ambitious so far, was presented to the state Assembly which seeks to give women an equal share in paternal property. A select committee of the state legislature gave its approval to the bill, introduced last March and now it only awaits its final passage in the next session.

But already, the response from women has been overwhelming. Nandepenini Rajkumari, who hit the headlines by washing Rama Rao's feet on his arrival from the US recently, gushed: "The bill is a revolutionary step. Women will have a say in their dowry and if the marriage breaks up, they can live happily on their own share of the property."

The bill seeks to give daughters, who were majors but unmarried before March 18 last year, a share in the Hindu joint family property. Daughters will be treated as coparceners (joint heirs) from birth. At present, in the Hindu joint family governed by the Mitakshara Law, a woman acquires the right to ancestral property only on the death of the parent while the son acquires it at birth.

But the bill had a stormy passage in the male-dominated committee and some women intellectuals have expressed optimism. Says Leelavathi Raghaviah, editor of the Telugu monthly *Jyothi*: "The bill is a beginning. For the first time, a politician is talking about women's problems and equal rights to property has definite advantages for women."

Despite that, if Rama Rao's other schemes to "liberate" women and give them their rightful place in society are any indication, his latest one is headed for controversy. Last January, the state Government passed an order that 30 per cent of all government jobs be reserved for women but so far all it has achieved is divide opinion on its efficacy, even among women. The Minister for Women's Welfare, Prathibha Bharati, was blissfully ignorant about the order. Meanwhile, Lakshmi Bhagyanagar, founder of the Andhra Yuvati Mandal, avers, "reservation is disgusting. We must be taken on our own merit and not because we are women." Conversely, Malladi Subamma, president of the Mahila Abhyudaya Samstha, demands that the reservations should be increased to 50 per cent. "The male chauvinists sitting on the selection panels choose their own sex," she charges.

Some of the other Projects are:

► "Vimukti" (Liberation) designed to set up eight-seater community lavatories for village women.

► A "dole" of Rs 50 a month for widows earning less than Rs 1,800 a year. Originally, 50,000 widows were to benefit but so far only 9,200 women can qualify because of the restricted financial outlay.

► Hostels for working women and vocational training centres. A total of 11 hostels have so far been opened but the one in Srikakulam, the district of the minister for women's welfare, had just three residents for the first five months. The reason: only working women earning less than Rs 1,000 a month were eligible but most teachers and clerks who would normally use the hostel earn more.

► A women's university inaugurated in April 1983 which plans to introduce post-graduate courses in sericulture, cartography, computer programming and food technology among other subjects. It is expected to be ready early next year.

Meanwhile, Rama Rao has other ambitious plans for women waiting to be launched at the appropriate time. He has picked a woman, Chhaya Rathan, to head the Directorate of Women's Welfare Programmes and five Telugu Desam activists have been appointed to keep track of the various schemes. Every Telugu Desam party office down to the village level has at least one woman member on the executive (this is, in fact, part of the party's constitution).In the state capital, the party state executive has a woman vice-president, T.N. Sadalakshmi, and the secretary of the state legislature party is also a woman.

But despite that, Rama Rao's myriad women's welfare schemes continue to come under increasing fire. Critics point out that many of the programmes do not filter down to the section of women who need them most. More telling is their charge that crimes against women have shown an upward climb. There were 326 cases of rape last year as against only 71 in 1981. What is embarrassing is that it is highest in Krishna, the chief minister's home district. But that seems to be adequately countered by Rama Rao's starry-eyed image among women that seems to have changed little since his celluloid crusades. Consequently, whether his programmes work or not, the mere fact of their much-publicised introduction is enough to send women swooning—right into the waiting arms of his vote bank.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

AID INDIA CONSORTIUM

Pat on the Back



THE POPULAR, world-wide perception of Indian economy is that it is a bumbling, red tape-infested comedy of errors. Yet, in sharp contrast with this prevailing view, international experts and bankers continue to give India's economic performance high marks and optimistic forecasts. Nowhere was this rosy attitude more evident than at the recently concluded Aid India Consortium meeting in Paris where 14 countries and the World Bank pledged about $4 billion in concessional aid to meet India's investment needs. This was a billion dollars more than what India had received in pledges the previous year.

The largest chunk—$2.5 billion—came from the World Bank. But there were other pleasant surprises. Italy, which gave nothing last year, pledged $110 million. France's pledge increased from $ 44.50 million last year to $ 119.4 million this year; Germany went up from $ 89.29 million last year to $ 214.3 million; the European Economic Community from $50 million last year to $ 122 million this year, and Japan from $ 142.27 million last year to $ 166.3 million this year. After Germany, the United States remained the second largest donor with a pledge of $ 192 million—the same as last year. Britain's pledge declined from last year's $ 185.27 million to $ 178.9 million.

The mood at the Paris conference was described by one diplomat as "upbeat". Consortium members rated the Indian economy's performance "excellent". And in a plea for continued concessional aid to India, World Bank Vice-President for South Asia, David Hopper, made a statement that could just as well have been prepared for him by the Indian delegation. Said Hopper: "India's ability to meet its development goals in the Seventh Five-Year Plan period will require larger foreign capital flows. The seventh plan will be initiated at a time when there is a global decline in bilateral and multilateral concessional assistance. India will have to continue to borrow from commercial sources. However, as the composition of capital flows to India hardens, the risk of a severe deterioration in the external economic environment and the impact that this could have on the debt service burden are and will remain sources of deep concern to the Government of India... to minimise these risks India needs our more active participation through the provision of more aid on the best possible terms."

According to several experts, consortium members were impressed by the fact that India has leaped headlong into the industrial age without becoming a threat to the world banking or monetary system. India's $ 19 billion outstanding international debt stands in shining and exemplary contrast to the hundreds of billions of dollars owned by countries like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Poland, that threaten to plunge international banking and the IMF into a severe crisis.

Another facet of the Indian economy that has escaped mass media attention in India but which received warm praise from the financial pundits gathered in Paris was India's "adjustment programme" which is also described by some observers as "India's mini-leap forward". The "adjustment programme" begun four years ago, was a mosaic of investment programmes and policies aimed at producing a burst of acceleration in India's economic growth within a short period, while simultaneously bringing down the external balance of payment to manageable proportions. The new policies called for increasing growth rate investments in irrigation, energy and transport, and raising exports.

The World Bank's Hopper noted that after four years of implementation the "adjustment programme" has produced encouraging results despite a severe drought, a global recession and continued infrastructure constraints. And there were good reasons behind Hopper's accolades:

► The first three years of the "adjustment programme" witnessed a historic breakthrough. India escaped from its traditional constraint of a 3.5 per cent growth rate and reached a new level of 5 per cent. And the growth rate during the last quarter reached a heady 7 per cent. Agricultural growth rate remained at between 10 and 12 per cent with food grain production during the 1982-83 drought season being about 19 million tonnes higher than in the equally severe drought year of 1979-80 "indicating the strong progress made in improving the resilience of Indian agriculture to drought," one World Bank paper said.

► During this short period India recorded dramatic increases in crude oil production which almost doubled from 10.5 million tonnes in 1980-81 to 26.2 million tonnes in 1983-84. The share of oil imports in total oil consumption declined from 66 per cent in 1980-81 to only 27 per cent in 1983-84. Finance Secretary P.K. Kaul called the increase in domestic oil production the single most important factor in bringing a turnaround in the balance of payments situation. But there was an equally important windfall that helped. Remittances from non-resident Indians to Indian banks, that had averaged about Rs 200 crore, jumped to a whopping Rs 800 crore in 1983-84.

Real investment in energy and basic infrastructure sectors, although lower than initial plan targets, increased at substantially higher levels than in previous years. Hopper also noted that "thanks to prudent external debt management, India succeeded in raising its growth rate without endangering its high credit worthiness".



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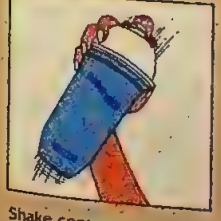
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India now is poised precariously on the brink of the Seventh Five-year plan in which there are to be massive investments in power, petroleum and irrigation. The slogan for the new plan will be "food, work and productivity". But Kaul warned the consortium members that even though 90 per cent of India's development investment comes from her own savings—the highest ratio in the developing world—"aid on appropriate terms is crucial as even marginal shortfalls in foreign exchange availability can create severe disruption in our development programme".

The talking paper prepared for the consortium noted that the success of the "adjustment programme" was based in part on liberalised import policies, production licensing, prices, foreign investment, transfer of technology and commercial borrowing. These liberalisations have been approved by the World Bank. The approach, however, involves risks.



"The availability of aid is crucial. Even a marginal shortfall can create severe disruption in our development programme."

—P.K. KAUL, finance secretary

Small as it may be, the need for concessionary aid for the Indian economy is real. During 1982-83 India's gross domestic product (GDP) was $174.74 billion. Of this total, $44.99 billion—or 24.6 per cent—was invested for economic development. But even this investment, after all, must come out of savings. India's gross national saving during this period totalled $38.12 billion, or 22.3 per cent of GDP. But the country reinvested 24.6 per cent of GDP thereby creating a gap of 2.3 per cent in the investment financing that has to be met from somewhere. It is to fill this gap that India turns to the outside world for concessional financing. This year this 2.3 per cent gap amounted to $3.87 billion.

Indian planners look to foreign concessional borrowing to fill this gap for several reasons. Taxation, domestic borrowing and deficit financing are stretched to breakpoint levels. This foreign concessional aid has also helped Indian planners to avoid taking high interest commercial loans wherever they could find them. But what with IDA (the World Bank's soft loan window) funds drying up because of China's demands for loan assistance, India has reluctantly been relying on commercial borrowing.

The question is often asked, after so many years of economic development, why does India still need concessional aid. A senior Indian official explained: "Because of our pattern of economic development we invest large chunks in our infrastructure. These expenditures do not produce immediate monetary or financial returns which would be needed to service and pay off short-term commercial debts. These projects have to be financed through long-term borrowing."

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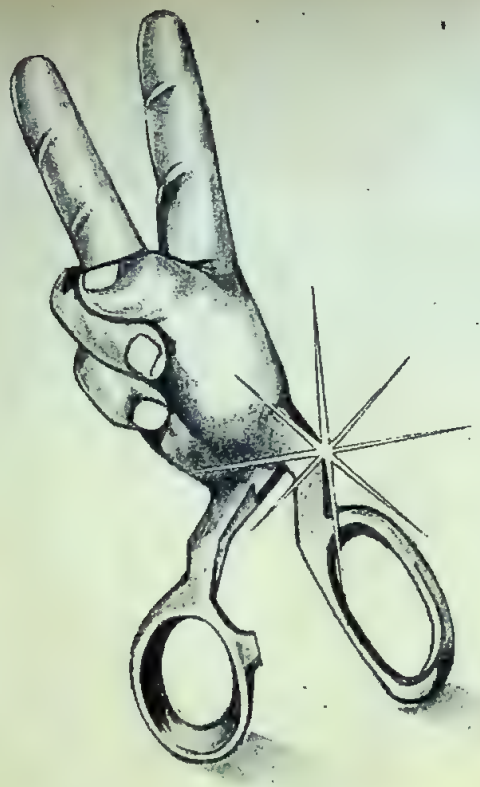
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The Elusive Solution



WERE the situation not so serious, it would have been viewed as nothing more than a comic interlude in a rather grim drama. Yet, for all that, when the short, stout Falstaffian figure of Baba Santa Singh waddled onto the Punjab stage last fortnight, it did add an intriguing new element to the long-running drama.

After being dominated so long and so tragically by men of evil countenance, the unexpected arrival of Santa Singh in the Golden Temple was something of an anticlimax especially since he also symbolised the Government's desperation in trying to come to grips with the post-operation situation in Punjab. After negotiations between army generals and government representatives with the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) over the sensitive question of *kar sewa* to repair the heavily damaged Akal Takht had broken down, New Delhi played one of its few remaining cards in the form of the rotund Nihang leader. Initially, it appeared that the card was a joker.

Dressed in the colourful saffron and blue-skirted dress of the Nihangs, Baba Santa Singh *Chheyanvi Kirori* (one with 96 crore followers) arrived at Amritsar's famous Gurudwara Burz Akali Phula Singh in a blaze of government-inspired publicity under the escort of scores of Punjab police commandos and army jawans. "Here look at my forces, we are a sect of martyrs," he declared pointing to the hundreds of his followers dressed in ancient warrior costumes. Within hours of his arrival, the gurudwara resembled a Nihang *chhawni* (cantonment). While some of his followers set up community kitchens, others stacked the arms they had arrived with. Meanwhile, the Baba's personal staff washed his scarred feet or trailed behind him with a room cooler on a long electric cord, an essential part of his baggage.

But behind the surface comedy lay the grim reality that Santa Singh and his fellow Nihangs represented the storm-troopers of the Government's new offensive aimed at destroying the remnants of the Akali Dal leadership and also its desperate search for a solution to the Punjab problem. But the Akalis retaliated with a tactical strategem.

On a stage dominated for nearly a fortnight by the Nihang chief, entered yet another Baba, one a lot less comical and far more illustrious. For nearly a month after Operation Bluestar, Mrs Gandhi's favourite trouble-shooters from Delhi, led by Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Buta Singh, had made the rounds of Bir Baba Budha Ji, a hallowed shrine 20 km from Amritsar, trying to persuade Baba Kharak Singh to take over *kar sewa*. The 90-year-old Baba, one of the most prominent builders of gurudwaras through *kar sewa* turned down Buta Singh's repeated entreaties—but then suddenly sprang a surprise last week



Nihangs performing *kar sewa* at the Golden Temple: embroiled in controversy

by announcing that he was ready to perform *kar sewa*, on the request of the SGPC and Akali Dal who, in turn, promptly added the rider that the Government first withdraw the army from the temple. Santa Singh's reaction was angry and sharp. Said he: "Before I came in I wrote to Baba Kharak Singh, offering to help in *kar sewa* led by him. He never replied. It does not behove of him to step in suddenly now. This could only lead to confrontation."

MATTERS were complicated further by the SGPC and Akali Dal who, while inviting Baba Kharak Singh, also charged the Government with having forcibly imposed Santa Singh on the Sikhs. The stage was set for yet another politico-religious battle between the two babas. It also placed the Government on the horns of a vicious dilemma. If it persisted with Santa Singh, the Sikh masses would never accept *kar sewa*. If it decided to sacrifice Santa Singh, he could raise a tremendous stink. Besides, that would be just the kind of concession on which the Akalis would claim victory. Moreover, once the work was handed over to Kharak Singh, the Government would have no way of ensuring that the Akal Takht was rebuilt and not retained in its present, bombed out state, which has been the Government's main apprehension.

Mrs Gandhi could perhaps not have anticipated this additional complication when Parliament reopened for its monsoon session on July 23. In a no-holds-barred offensive the ruling party pulled out all stops as it sought to paint the Akalis and the Opposition as abettors of extremists. In the lead was Mrs Gandhi herself who argued that the Government had delayed action since the Opposition had been optimistic of an accord with the Akalis. It was then the turn of the new Home Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to take up the cudgels followed by Rajiv Gandhi who, in an hour-long speech sounded off against the Opposition. The Government's strategy became clear as events unfolded. Mrs Gandhi had decided to go on the offensive to deny the Akalis any political mileage out of the situation. It was a ruthless attack where the ruling party often even contradicted itself or indulged in sheer prevarication. Charges not mentioned in the White Paper were levelled against the Akalis—Mrs Gandhi dismissed the White Paper as a document written by "bureaucrats". There was the usual insinuation of a foreign hand but once again, Mrs Gandhi and her spokesmen refused to specify anything, arguing that she was not making a case in a court of law.

On the ground, in Amritsar, it was equally clear that the Government was in no mood to allow the Akalis a say in the rebuilding of the Akal Takht and it was determined that the repairs would be undertaken quickly one way or the other. The Government's front man was Baba Santa Singh who, ignoring the fulminations of the priests and the Akalis, pressed his followers into action to start clearing the mound of debris from the vicinity of the Akal Takht. Daily wage labourers were joined by Muslim craftsmen brought in from Ajmer and Udaipur to craft marble slabs for the damaged building.

Earlier in the fortnight, engineering, art and archaeological experts, handpicked by the Government and accompanied by Buta Singh had spent hours taking notes and measurements inside the Akal Takht remains. An old, detailed map of the building had been fished out of the archives and details of carvings and terracotta work had been obtained from the government museum in Chandigarh. The plan, clearly, was to keep everything ready for reconstruction as soon as Santa Singh's followers cleared the debris and neutralised opposition from the Akalis. Said an architect involved in the work: "It is nothing like the restoration in



Baba Santa Singh after arrival in Amritsar: forcing the issue

Germany after the Second World War. But we have undoubtedly begun the biggest restoration plan in our history." Buta Singh boasted confidently: "I put the Asiad together in such a short time. This will not take too long either."

But as an official admitted: "If our objective was to build a facade for speedy repair of the Akal Takht, it has been achieved. But if it was to make the Sikh masses swing away from their traditional leadership, we may have ensured just the reverse."

Yet, for a fleeting moment on July 16, there was hope in Amritsar. As the hoot of the pilot car's siren announced the arrival of the army's top brass—including the acting army chief Lt-General Tirath Singh Oberoi—into the SGPC-run Guru Ram Dass Hospital, Akali leaders, including Bibi Rajinder Kaur, chief of the party's women's wing, were brimming with hope. Three days of intense negotiations had thrown up a formula of sorts. The Akalis promised not to let arms enter the temple and to invite Baba Kharak Singh to perform the *kar sewa*. While the army insisted on a right to maintain a picket on the *darshani deori*, the Akalis were inclined to give two rooms on the parikrama, facing the temple, to jawans dressed in mufti. But now, in the evening, the generals had brought in a surprise. They told the Akalis that New Delhi had decided that they were still not trustworthy and thus Baba Santa Singh had been brought in to share *kar sewa* with them.

For the Akalis, who have a running feud with Santa Singh's pro-Congress Nihangs, this was a no-go situation. It later turned out that while the generals had been made to talk to the Akalis for hours together, a fleet of buses guarded by Punjab police commandos had quietly brought in the Nihangs into curfew-bound Amritsar from their headquarters near Bhatinda, about 300 km away. Even to the army brass the news of the move was broken by Congress(I) MP Arun Nehru and K.C. Pant who flew in from Delhi in the evening.

The retaliation was not long in coming. The five high priests camping in Amritsar issued a *hukamnama* (edict) barring the Sikhs from participating in the *kar sewa* without their sanction. Immediately, Santa Singh was summoned by the head priests to explain his conduct. He haughtily ignored the summons and was excommunicated from the faith. The same threat was held out to all other Sikhs participating in the *kar sewa*.

Overnight, what initially began as a row between the Government and the Akalis was transformed into an internecine battle between the Sikhs themselves. Never in the faith's 500-year history had the traditional authority of the *panth* been challenged so brazenly. Said Santa Singh haughtily: "Who are these priests but salaried employees of the SGPC? How can they issue a *hukamnama* when the Akal Takht itself has been destroyed. We will first build the Akal Takht, restore its *maryada* (tradition and dignity). Then we will see what *hukamnama* is issued."

WHILE most people were still not inclined to view him seriously, Santa Singh's robust logic and defiance caught even the Sikh religious leadership on the wrong foot. Obviously, behind a ridiculously outlandish facade Santa Singh hides a shrewd politico-religious personality. As he repeatedly took them to task for having allowed the Golden Temple to become an extremist sanctuary, the SGPC and the priests could answer him only in unconvincing embarrassment.

Understandably surprised by the defiance, the priests were confused. "You are taking your army away. But how are we going to get rid of this army you are leaving here?" one of them, in visible desperation, asked Major-General K.S. Brar as he came to the temple on his farewell visit before leaving for Meerut. Said the acting Akali Dal chief Prakash Singh Majithia: "What can you do when people turn against their own faith? All I can say is that these are not Guru Hargobind's Nihangs. They are Congress(I) Nihangs."

But if the entry of the Nihangs had caused the Akalis temporary discomfiture it could also prove to be a blessing in disguise. Beleaguered and totally lacking in credibility, the Akalis had been looking for a *casus belli* to regain support in their constituency. The Government's effort to begin *kar sewa* through Santa Singh gave them just the populistic cause they had been looking for. Said Akali leader Major Singh Uboke: "This is our best chance. At last it is becoming a purely religious movement." Even in the state Congress(I) circles there were apprehensions that the move could misfire. The Nihangs are sticky customers with a history of gurudwara grabbing behind them. Said a Congress(I) leader, declining to be identified: "My fear is we are replacing one scourge with another. Tomorrow it may be difficult to dislodge Santa Singh whose followers carry firearms too. And how do you convince the

THE NIHANGS

Storm-troopers

"*SHIROMANI Panth Akali Budha Dal Panjwan Takhat Chalda Wahir Chakarvarti Punjab Hindustan Vishv 96 Crorie Jathedar Singh Sahib Baba Sant Singh ji Akali Nihang Singhan*," reads the intriguing inscription on the bus. Translated loosely, it is a tribute to the glory of the "great Sikh Baba Santa Singh, with 96 crore followers spread all over Punjab, India and the world, representing the Shiromani Akali Budha Dal, the all-conquering army."

The butt of many jokes in recent decades, the Nihangs, colourfully attired and armed with an assortment of weapons ranging from swords and shields to carbines, constitute the most distinctive group among the Sikhs. Says Baba Santa Singh, their present chief: "We trace our ancestry back to the sixth Guru Hargobind, whose disciple Baba Budha ji had set up the first Sikh army." Santa Singh claims to be the 13th in the line of succession after Baba Budha ji.

While Santa Singh and his followers trace their origin back to the period of the sixth Guru (1595-1644), they got their present name much later, in the time of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, when, out of the Guru's armies, one of his sons selected a band of fierce fighters of the devil-may-care variety. These were given the name of Nihang, a Persian expression meaning crocodile.

In the course of time they fought numerous battles for the Guru and later for their chiefs and finally under the banner of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Nihangs were split into two major divisions in 1733: the Budha Dal, consisting of veterans and Taruna Dal of younger entrants to the order. Baba Santa Singh represents the descendants of the former.

Even during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who raised a modern Sikh army trained by French generals, a band of Nihangs formed his fighting spearhead. They were led by the legendary Akali Phula Singh, who later came to become the jathedar of the Akal Takht and even declared Ranjit Singh a "*tankhaiya*", a defaulter to the faith for his alleged liaison with a Muslim courtesan. History has it that he ordered

Ranjit Singh to be lashed at the Akal Takht and the monarch presented himself for the punishment, though at the last moment the sentence was not carried out. The massive, oblong shrine where Baba Santa Singh now stays in Amritsar is named Burz Akali Phula Singh after the same legendary Nihang hero and it is ironical that the shrine is now occupied by a descendant of Phula Singh who has himself been declared *tankhaiya* by the Akal Takht.

Over the years as they fought suicidal battles and lived off the jungle in marginal conditions the Nihangs developed their own distinctive lifestyle, mannerisms and even language. To a Nihang even today to answer the call of nature is to "conquer Chittor or Multan", smoking is "kissing a female donkey" and red chilli is "a quarrelsome woman". Also, perhaps because of the harsh lives they were forced to lead the Nihangs were allowed the use of a concoction made of cannabis and dry fruit which they call *garamjal* (hot water).

Their peculiar life-style has made tales of Nihang idiosyncrasies legion. Any Jat Sikh peasant in Punjab will reel out dozens of jokes about the Nihangs. A popular one goes like this: A Jat asked a Nihang horseman what the time was. The Nihang got off and in a proud display of his martial craft stuck his spear into the ground. He tied a thread to it, studied the shadow for a while and triumphantly announced, "quarter-to-three". "And what will happen when there is no sunshine," the Jat asked mischievously. "What do you think I carry this watch for," shot back the Nihang pointing at his wrist.

But politically, the Nihangs are not a joke. Over the years the SGPC has been giving them a share out of its earnings from the gurudwaras, mainly with the objective of keeping them on its side. But Nihang loyalties have wavered. Towards the early '70s, however, they came close to Zail Singh who presented a foreign car to Baba Santa Singh. Since then the Budha Dal Nihangs have often been seen at the Congress(I) election rallies and Baba Santa Singh has been blessing Mrs Gandhi during the elections.

The Nihangs are known for their legendary proclivity for intervening in land disputes. Often they end up grabbing the land themselves. In January 1978 they had even fought pitched armed battles with the Haryana armed police, which tried to evict them from lands they had occupied in Kaithal in Kurukshetra district. After four Nihangs died in the exchange of fire with the police, Bibi Rajinder Kaur, chief of the women's wing of the Akali Dal, took



BHAWAN SINGH

Santa Singh: defiant stand

up cudgels on behalf of Baba Santa Singh, charging the Haryana Government with slaughtering "my poor Sikhs like animals". But last fortnight in Amritsar, the roles had reversed as Santa Singh made his entry under heavy police escort while Rajinder Kaur courted arrest at the head of a *shahidi jatha* (martyrs' procession).

Yet while Rajinder Kaur and the other Akalis condemned him as a Congress(I) stooge, Santa Singh stridently stated: "We are the real Akalis, the genuine religious heirs to the gurudwaras," he told Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA in an interview laced with quick repartee and witticisms. His views.

On the allegation that he is a government stooge.

Utter rubbish. We are the real heirs of the Sikh shrines and traditions. We were authorised to look after the Gurudwaras by the Sixth Guru while the SGPC got its authority from an act passed by the British. The act should have gone across the seven seas along with the British. In any case, whose authority is paramount, the Guru's or the British rulers'?

On why he is so upset with the SGPC.

They have been messing about for 60 years. They just make a commotion. I call them Khappoo Singhs (Khap means noise in Punjabi). Their movement has failed and now they are running morchas, hiding behind women and children. Why didn't they act when Bhindranwale's men were going about defecating and drying underwear on the balconies of the Akal Takht?

On the Akalis' excuse that they did not oppose Bhindranwale out of fear.

Why did they never approach me for help? I would have happily sent in my cavalry. What are all these gallant horsemen for if not for saving the shrines from desecration? It is because they did not ask their own Sikh armies that Mrs Gandhi had to send in hers.

On display of firearms by his men.

These are licensed weapons. I am myself authorised to issue certain licences. But these arms are meant to protect and not slaughter innocent people.

On the Khalistan demand.

Isn't the President of India a Sikh? There are so many ministers, generals, officers. There is no discrimination. And in which little district will they make their Khalistan?

On the charge the his men would take cannabis inside the temple.

Address this charge to those who were actually selling opium inside the temple. I am told opium was being sold for as little as a rupee a capsule. Today we are finding bottles of rum and even safety razors in the debris in the Akal Takht.

Sikhs that one man's rifles are less undesirable than another's?"

Said Amarinder Singh, who resigned from the Congress(I) and Parliament in protest against the army action but is opposed to the idea of keeping the destroyed Akal Takht as a relic: "The present arrangement where Santa Singh plays to the tune of either the army or some ruling party gentlemen shall prove counter-productive. It is the familiar divide and rule strategy that we will not tolerate. Akal Takht constructed by the Government shall be demolished. If none else does it I would." His words are echoed by many other Sikhs.

But in Home Ministry circles, an amendment to the SGPC Act was already being contemplated. Said an official: "Most Hindu temples including Tirupati are managed by boards that have government nominees. What is so special about gurudwaras?" Younger functionaries in the ruling party, particularly, are inclined this way. The SGPC came into being on the basis of an Akali edict on the reform of gurudwaras in 1920 and was formalised by the Sikh Gurudwara Act passed by the British after a bloody agitation. The Act gave the SGPC, a body elected by all adult Sikhs, control over 232 gurudwaras in Punjab.

DELHI felt that the initial anger among the Sikhs was a temporary phase and would soon be replaced by a mood of realism. It was in this anticipation of relative peace on the agitation front that the Government had at last initiated the long-awaited process of reorganisation of the administrative machinery, beginning with the replacement of an erratic P.C. Sethi by P.V. Narasimha Rao (*page 21*). Major administrative changes being made in Punjab included:

- replacement of Chief Secretary K.D. Vasudeva, who has been indisposed for some time, by P.K. Kathpalia, a joint secretary in the Union Law Ministry;
- creation of a post of joint director by the Intelligence Bureau at Chandigarh. A police officer of inspector-general's rank is being shortly posted there;
- finalisation of the first list of officers to be brought into Punjab from outside states and Punjab officers to be transferred out of Punjab.

The high-powered administrative panel led by R.V. Subramaniam, an IAS officer who had been principal advisor to the governor in Assam during the elections in February 1983, had been touring the districts to finalise more transfers and postings. Indications were that the Government was planning to induct a number of CRPF and BSF officers on deputation to the Punjab police to deal with terrorists. "The local police officers have a genuine problem since they are easily recognisable," explained a home ministry official, mentioning the fact that even in the course of interrogation of terrorists caught in the army action, a lot of Punjab police officers have been wearing masks. Simultaneously the Government was going about modernising the police force. Yet as Mrs Gandhi firmly made clear in Parliament, the army was not going to be withdrawn in a hurry.

But even if the army stays on, the peace it promises can at best be tenuous. Its presence for too long will inevitably lead to irritation, its effectiveness will be guided by the law of diminishing returns. The fact was brought home rather effectively last fortnight with the sabotage of the Bhakra canal.

Wherever the blame may lie, the saboteurs did a shrewd job in selecting to breach a spot where the damage to the crops in the Punjab area would be minimal. The canal here passes through an aqueduct under the Siswan rivulet to provide it unhindered passage. A breach downstream was sure to hit the structures through the sheer force of gushing waters which would, in turn, go into the rivulet rather than flood farmlands in Punjab villages and alienate the local population. Earlier in June too a similar spot had been chosen and breached near the Budki rivulet.

Another sad point the canal breach proved was that there are still many terrorists roaming the countryside. In fact, in many villages all over the state, Khalistan flags have appeared on rooftops, more as a symbol of defiance than a wish for secession. Intelligence sources feel that now the extremist movement will become more like classical terrorism. The canal breaches are a case in point.

Intelligence sources also speak of the formation of a number of small terrorist groups styling themselves as suicidal assassination squads. One such group called "Miri-Piri" has reportedly been formed somewhere in the Amritsar district. According to intelligence men its objective is to kill President Zail Singh, Mrs Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and generals Dayal and Brar.

The trend that the extremist movement follows will also be closely linked to the way the Akali leadership grows in future. As of now, the Akalis stand discredited, outdated and incapable of defending themselves. This is to some extent because all their important leaders are in jail and because they are also finding it difficult to cover up for the series of blunders they have made in recent months. Today, a majority of the Sikhs look at them scornfully, for they "surrendered" rather than fought at the temple. The Hindus, the Government and moderates among the Sikhs also blame them for letting Bhindranwale convert the Golden Temple into a fortress for the terrorists.

It is against this background that the second-line Akali leadership has found it impossible to recapture the old fervour of the morcha. The lukewarm response to the *shahidi jatha* movement is a clear indication of this lack of credibility. The surviving rump of the Akali leadership today is caught on the horns of a dilemma, blaming the Government for all that has gone wrong on the one hand and defending their own impotence on the other. Said Bibi Rajinder Kaur: "Most of us were opposed to Bhindranwale's ways and it is true that we did not oppose him too stoutly. But remember that even the prime minister's son, who has so much security, was too scared to call him an extremist. Now, if he is afraid of the guns, aren't we?" But out in the streets the same leaders forget all about introspection. They hail Bhindranwale as a martyr and, in one sweep, sanctify all that he stood for and collected inside the temple.

Even if a little bashfully, the second-line leaders now admit that on present reckoning the new Sikh leadership will be bound to the Bhindranwale cult. Said an Akali leader, not wanting to be identified: "The Jat Sikhs have traditionally followed the most militant leaders. Now this militancy will no longer be agrarian, economic or purely political. It will be unadulterated religious fundamentalism." The younger generation among the Akalis feels a lot will now depend on who is chosen as the 14th head of the Damdami Taksal after Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. His death has brought the nearly three centuries old religious institution into the forefront of Sikh politics and the Government has been worried by the reports that the "wise, old men" at the *taksal* may decide to perpetuate the extremist cult and choose a hot-headed leader. There has been widespread speculation that the mantle will fall on Talwinder Singh, the well-known extremist the Indian police have been hunting for months. He had been caught by the West German police nearly a year ago and released mysteriously last month in the

absence of an extradition treaty between the two countries. Government sources say it will be a calamity of sorts if someone like him was to become the head of the *taksal*.

Older priests at Gurudwara Gurdarshan Prakash at Chowk Mehta near Amritsar, the headquarters of the *taksal*, allay the fears. Said Jagir Singh, one of the senior priests: "I can state it most emphatically that we have made no decision so far. In any case, there is no question of Talwinder being chosen, for he was not brought up in our *taksal*. Any Sikh can carry a kirpan and claim to be devout. But our order has its own creed and no one brought up outside can be true to it." The priests at Chowk Mehta also say that they will not think in terms of finding a successor till they are sure of Bhindranwale's death. Incredibly enough, the priests are not the only people in Punjab who still believe Bhindranwale is alive. A large number of people all over the state believe in the legend that he escaped using a tunnel and will reappear at an opportune time. Said a senior army officer displaying a set of pictures of Bhindranwale's body to INDIA TODAY: "Such fables spread everytime a controversial figure dies. People keep hoping that Pakistan Television will present Bhindranwale one of these days. If they raise Bhindranwale on their TV we will raise Bhutto on ours."

Akali led women's *shahidi jatha* at Amritsar: hardening of attitudes



Irrespective of whether the man is dead or alive, there is no wishing away his cult. Senior Congress(I) leaders also admit that their belated attempt to use and build up Santa Singh was part of a strategy to counter this factor. In Baba Santa Singh, the Congress(I) has a Sikh who looks more ancient, devout and warlike than most and is now leading *kar sewa*, one of the Sikhs' most hallowed traditions. But unfortunately, looks alone do not win political battles, not even in the realm of Punjab's often irrational politics. It is impossible for the Government to convince the ordinary Sikh that Santa Singh is more than a stooge. And till that is done Santa Singh and his *kar sewa* will remain no more than a gimmick, a bluff too transparent to win over a cynical Sikh population.

At least on the *kar sewa* question there is no alternative to having someone who can carry the whole Sikh *quam* with him. And that someone at the moment, even Congress(I) leaders admit, is Baba Kharak Singh who seems to be just that bit more inclined towards the Akalis and the SGPC. "You can hardly blame him for that," said a Congress(I) leader, explaining, "he has to be angry, for 22 of his unarmed followers were among those killed in the army action." As such, Kharak Singh is known for his haughty temper. Yet, he is a straightforward man of religion with no concern other than the enhancement of the glory of the *panth*. He also has never been part of the Akali Dal and it should be possible to persuade him to join in. But that would inevitably entail buying some kind of peace with the Akalis which the Government does not seem eager to do.

That is why the thrust and intensity of the Government's offensive against the Akalis could prove counter-productive in the long run. There is no denying that the Akalis have much to answer for their weakness, short-sightedness and even downright perfidy. Even in their mood of anger against the Government the Sikhs

understand that much. But the current government effort to push the Akalis to the wall could work to their advantage as any suggestion of "persecution", whether physical or political, would help them win back sympathy.

Thus, overdoing the Akalis' political condemnation at this stage cannot be compatible with a far-sighted strategy to apply the healing touch. The Government cannot gloss over the fact that while the Akalis abetted extremism, many of ruling party's own functionaries are not too innocent on this count. In the search for a solution to the Punjab tangle, the Akalis, Mrs Gandhi and the Opposition will have to bury the past, for any attempt to look back on their collective folly would only reopen wounds.

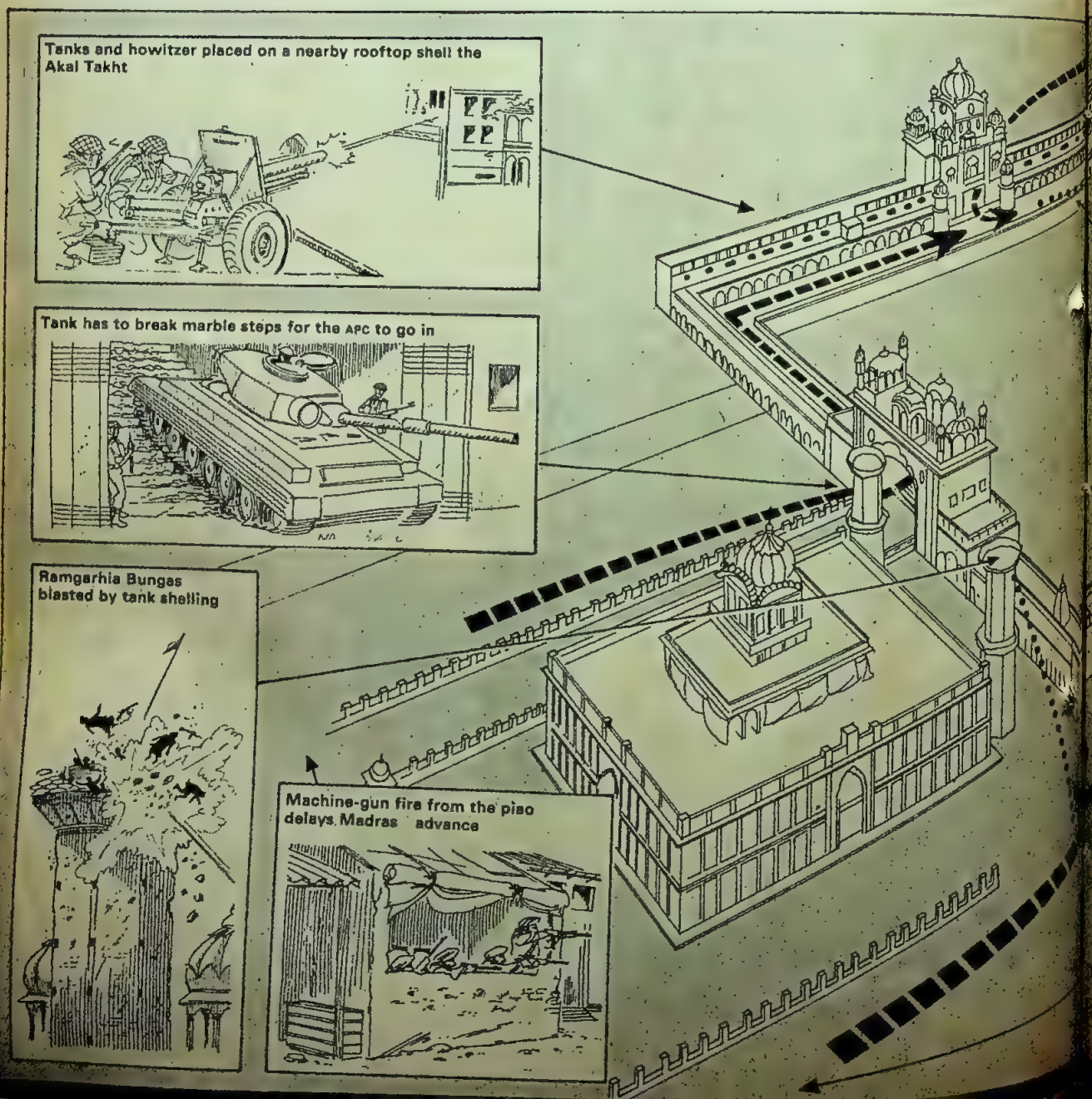
—SHEKHAR GUPTA with GOBIND THUKRAL

OPERATION BLUESTAR

Night of Blood

NEARLY two months after the troops moved into Punjab, many questions still remained unanswered about Operation Bluestar, undoubtedly the biggest internal security mission ever undertaken by the Indian Army. For example, what was the basic plan? What kind of tactics and weaponry was used? Was there an underestimation of the terrorist strength? And, finally, could the casualties have been minimised? Seeking answers to some of these questions Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *interviewed scores of military and intelligence officials. His report:*

FOR Major-General Kuldip Singh (Bulbul) Brar and his wife Meena, it was to be an elusive holiday in Manila. Just a day before they were booked on the flight, summons came from the Western Command headquarters at Simla for an urgent conference at Chandimandir cantonment near Chandigarh, the headquarters of the 2 Corps of the Indian Army. On the morning of June 1, the briefing hall was brimming with excitement. The western army commander Lt-General K. Sundarji and his chief of staff Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dayal



Design by B.K. Sharma and sketches by AJIT NINAN

were briefing a stunned audience of brass hats on the Operation Bluestar plan. It is now known that the operation was subdivided along two specific coordinates:

▸ **Operation Metal:** To prise the extremists out of the Golden Temple and to neutralise Bhindranwale, the task given to Brar's 9 Infantry Division.

▸ **Operation Shop:** To raid extremist hide-outs all over the state and to mop up the terrorist remnants from the countryside.

In addition, there was the equally crucial Operation Woodrose, under which the army units were to move into the border areas, taking over pickets routinely held by the BSF. As far as possible, the pickets were to be held in at least a company strength. Plans had been carefully made out on each operation and with it all, barring Operation Shop, more or less over now, it would be time now for the top brass and defence analysts to dissect the operations.

Obviously, in months to come, a lot of talk at the army's College of Combat at Mhow would revolve around Operation Metal. A major debating point would be the large number of casualties on both sides and the damage to the Akal Takht and question whether some of it was avoidable. Preliminary investigations, however, suggest that there had been a certain amount of underestimation of the fighting ability and the intensity of motivation among the religiously charged crowd around Bhindranwale. Together with lack of specific intelligence on the weaponry inside the temple and unexpected, last minute hitches, this must have at least partly contributed to the high casualty rate.

On the afternoon of June 3, as the first units of the army began the siege of the temple the generals still strongly felt that it would be possible to overawe the extremists with a show of strength and prevent large-scale bloodshed. But the first indications to the contrary came when the defenders refused to be quietened with the bombardment of their high-rise pillboxes atop the Ramgarhia Bungas, the 18th century brick towers and the water tank behind Teja Singh Samundari Hall. Knocked out first on the morning of June 4, the battlements were found to be manned again the following morning, forcing the army to use a tank firing from a distant locality near the



Sultanwind Gate which provided a clear view to them of the fortification on the water tank.

It was at this stage that the commanders accepted the inevitability of an infantry assault into the temple. According to original plan, the 10 Guards commanded by Lt-Colonel Israr Khan were to break into the parikrama from the main clock tower gate. To join up simultaneously were the troops of 26 Madras, brought in hastily from Jalandhar, from the serais' side. In view of the "plunging fire" from the battlements on the parikrama and the clock tower, the Guardsmen were to approach the gate following tanks and then spill over inside the parikrama, clearing rooms and battlements held by the extremists. Similarly, the Madrasis coming in from the other end were supposed to clear the other side. And while



Lt-General K. Sundarji

the infantry did this, the commandos, not of the regular army but from the Special Frontier Force (SFF), an outfit run by the Cabinet Secretariat at Chakrata, also called the RAW's Establishment-22 (set up in the early '60s to train Tibetan refugees in guerrilla warfare) were supposed to assault the temple and the Akal Takht and deliver the *coup de grace*. But in spite of the specialised gear, weapons and bullet-proof jackets, the SFF-men, who were the only ones to have rehearsed the raid thoroughly, found the fire from the Akal Takht too daunting and, failing to break into the Akal Takht, asked for tank support.

Complications had, meanwhile, arisen elsewhere also. While the commanders waited impatiently, the Madrasis were seemingly taking too long to get to the parikrama. But as it later turned out, it was not for want of trying. The steel gate at the entrance facing the serais had proved to be stronger than anticipated and a tank had to be used to knock it down. Again, just as they stepped in the Madrasis, commanded by Lt-Colonel Panikkar, ran into heavy fire and suffered casualties. They again ran into stiff resistance from terrorists who had taken a deadly position inside a strategically-placed *piao* (drinking water stall). The problem was compounded as the troops of the Madras Regiment and a company of Kumaon Regiment, originally held as reserve, got mixed in the darkness on the steps leading to the parikrama, leaving the officers with the frustrating task of first separating their respective troops while the extremists inflicted casualties.

With commandos failing to break through at the Akal Takht, generals had already begun in terms of an old-fashioned infantry assault and reserves were being summoned in the form of 7th Battalion of the Garhwal Regiment, who were, in fact, part of the 15 Division. Brigadier A.K. Diwan, nicknamed "Cheeky" and deputy GOC of the 15 Division had come in to coordinate the transfer of his Division's troops to the operation and found himself in the parikrama, under heavy fire.

THE INFANTRY was facing its most daunting challenge from the machine-guns sited nine inches above the ground along the parikrama. The defenders had correctly guessed that the troops will first neutralise the rows of rooms on the two floors of the parikrama. Recalls an officer: "Shahbeg had shown shrewd judgement in siting the machine-guns nine inches above the ground to cover the area with what we call as the grazing fire. He knew the regular Indian army drill for such an operation where troops are taught to crawl and throw grenades into the rooms one by one and the machine-guns would have slaughtered crawling troops." Fortunately, the officers decided that the space in and around the parikrama was too narrow for the men to crawl around. They thus decided to hide behind the pillars and spring out occasionally to throw a grenade into a room. This explains the high incidence of bullet injuries in the leg. Among the first to be wounded in the Guards' assault was company commander Major Jasbir Singh Raina, a Sikh. Later, the Madrasis lost young Lieutenant Ram Prakash Ruparia to a sniper's bullet. Ignoring the Akal Takht for the moment, Brar asked the infantry to first clear the first floor of the parikrama in spite of the casualties. The approach at the two ends was effectively guarded by extremists hiding in manholes placed right next to the staircases. The troops were ordered to improvise assault ladders, which they did.

Still trying to avoid a massacre, the commanders pressed the troops into a desperate bid to lob gas-grenades into the Akal Takht. The SFF commandos were again asked to somehow reach close enough to the building and lob canisters containing "CS" gas, supposed to be slightly stronger than ordinary tear-gas. According to the commanders, there were three reasons the move did not succeed:

► The gas-grenades can be launched only at very short distances. The cost of getting that close, in terms of casualties, was prohibitive.



Lt-General Ranjit Singh Dayal

► With most of the entrances and windows heavily sandbagged it was difficult to aim a canister inside the building.

► A stiff breeze also diminished the gas-grenades' effectiveness.

With the move failing and infantry pinned down by effective fire from the Akal Takht, the temple and parts of the parikrama, it was now time for frontal assaults. It was in one of these that the Kumaon Regiment's Major Misra, along with seven other ranks, was killed a few yards from the Akal Takht entrance. Facing the daunting prospect of moving over the heap of their bodies, a batch of volunteers from the Madras Regiment, led by a young captain, stormed into the building. They were the first troops to have "contacted" the Akal Takht. Of the 10 volunteers, seven died in the narrow passage as they ran into a large body of extremists, two crawled back severely

wounded and only the captain returned unhurt much later, after trying to retrieve an injured junior commissioned officer (JCO), who was ultimately abandoned. He was later caught by Bhindranwale's men, tortured, and blown up with dynamite sticks.

By this time Brigadier (now Major-General) Diwan, who had almost by coincidence found himself inside the temple, had taken charge of the affairs. A decision was now made to use harsher methods and armoured personnel carriers (APC's) of a mechanised infantry battalion were called in. But the APC's of the Scot variety, which is wheeled and not tracked, unlike the more modern APC's had trouble coming down the steps from the entrance into the parikrama. A Vijayanta tank had to be summoned to break the marble steps. "This too was a tricky operation," recalls an officer, adding, "our fear was that if the tank rolls down or gets bogged down, it may block the only good entry point we had for armoured vehicles." The tank, had to be used carefully, breaking a step at a time, reversing, and then repeating the process.

But even when the APC's finally made it to the parikrama, the move did not make too much difference as the extremists fired from a Chinese-made Rocket Propelled Grenade launcher (RPG-7), knocking out the lead APC and wounding Captain Hardev Singh in it. A decision was made to abandon the APC and while alighting, the driver was shot in the eye and killed. Alongside, yet another novel trick was being tried to neutralise the Akal Takht. The commanders brought in a tank with its bright, blinding xenon lamps to momentarily blind defenders in the Akal Takht while the troops closed in. In conventional warfare, the lamp is used only for a few seconds at a time to light up a target and the filament burns out in just two minutes. The tank had to be replaced each time the filament was burnt and the intervening delay reduced the effectiveness of the move. Later, as the night wore on, xenon lights were used in short spells.

The commanders were now faced with a terribly difficult situation. The dawn was not too far away and, as a senior officer recalls, once the place was lighted, each of the nearly 800 troops inside the parikrama could have been picked out by snipers. This is when tanks of the 16 Cavalry were asked to come in. The tank-men were initially told to use only the "secondary armament", meaning thereby the machine-gun mounted on the turret. Later, however, the main gun was used too.

Simultaneously, an artillery colonel was asked to take an ancient 3.7 inch howitzer atop a tall building overlooking the Akal Takht. Officers explain the howitzer was chosen for shelling since it can fire straight on, horizontally, promising greater accuracy at close range. Initially the artillery-men tried to mount the gun atop the building of a nationalised bank. But in spite of generous help from scores of civilians it proved impossible to haul up the heavy artillery piece with ropes. Later another building was chosen. To ensure that the aim was accurate, the gunners first fired smoke shells, then the real fireworks began.

As shelling continued troops lay sprawling, firing intermittently. By the morning of June 6, resistance had diminished and there was guesswork among the commanders as to what had happened to



Major-General Kuldip Singh Brar

Bhindranwale and his key lieutenants. At 11 a.m., officers recall, there was a mad dash-out from the Akal Takht building. Nearly 25 men sprinted across, probably trying to make for the temple building, but most of them were mowed down. A few threw away their weapons and succeeded in jumping into the holy tank. They were killed there.

The suicidal break-out made the generals guess that Bhindranwale had by now died or escaped. Yet, till the evening, stray firing continued. It was later discovered that a handful of survivors inside had been keeping the army's attention diverted with stray sniping to gain time to throw weapons, cash and valuables in a well behind the Akal Takht building. Later in the day the troops caught a wounded youngster, perhaps a temple *sewadar* (worker), crawling out of the Akal Takht, who first reported that Bhindranwale was dead and Shahbeg seriously wounded. He later took the jawans to the Akal Takht basement where Bhindranwale's body was found, in a heap of about 40.

Away from the main theatre of operations a body of troops near the serais was grappling with another problem—a thousand pilgrims, including many women and children were trapped inside the rooms. A majority of these were part of a jatha that had come from Sangrur to court arrest as part of the ongoing Akali morcha. The rest included SGPC employees, labourers and pilgrims who had come from faraway places on June 3, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjun Dev. Survivors' accounts vary but it seems that panic gripped everyone and the army's warnings over megaphones often got lost in the din of gunfire and shrieks. Many pilgrims died as Bhindranwale's men threw grenades to prevent the Akali leaders from surrendering. Later, as the army got sniped at from a number of rooms in the parikrama and the serais the troops just threw grenades into the rooms. "People were dying on both sides", recalls an officer, adding, "and there was no time to find out who was inside a room." Some of the pilgrims also died of thirst. It is believed that of the 765 civilians who died inside the temple complex over 50 per cent were pilgrims. The dead included 55 women and 15 children.

While brains at the Staff College and College of Combat would now be going into the finer points of the operation a few facts stand out prominently:

► There was certainly an underestimation of the extremists' armed strength and fighting ability. A clear indication of this is that only a 50-bed field hospital had been organised in Amritsar while the casualties crossed the 500-mark.

► There had been a lack of coordination among the army, the civil authorities and the police. This is obvious from the fact that the troops did not know about a small exit behind the Guru Nanak Niwas through which over 150 persons, including many key extremists of the Babbar Khalsa faction, escaped.

The army's argument here would be that active coordination with the police would not have served the cause of secrecy which was of paramount importance. In any case, as an officer explained, this was the most unusual and undoubtedly the trickiest operation ever carried out in the history of Indian security forces. And if such an operation did not leave a trail of ponderables, what else would?

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Amritsar

PHOTO FEATURE BY RAGHU RAI

Inside the Golden Te



en Temple

Amritsar's Golden Temple, the symbol of the Sikh faith, is today also the symbol of the emotional catharsis of the community after Operation Bluestar. Nothing is more palpable as pilgrims walk its marbled parikrama or throng the gold-plated Harmandir Sahib.



Devotees at the entrance to Harmandir Sahib (top) and (below) on its terrace looking at stray bullet marks.

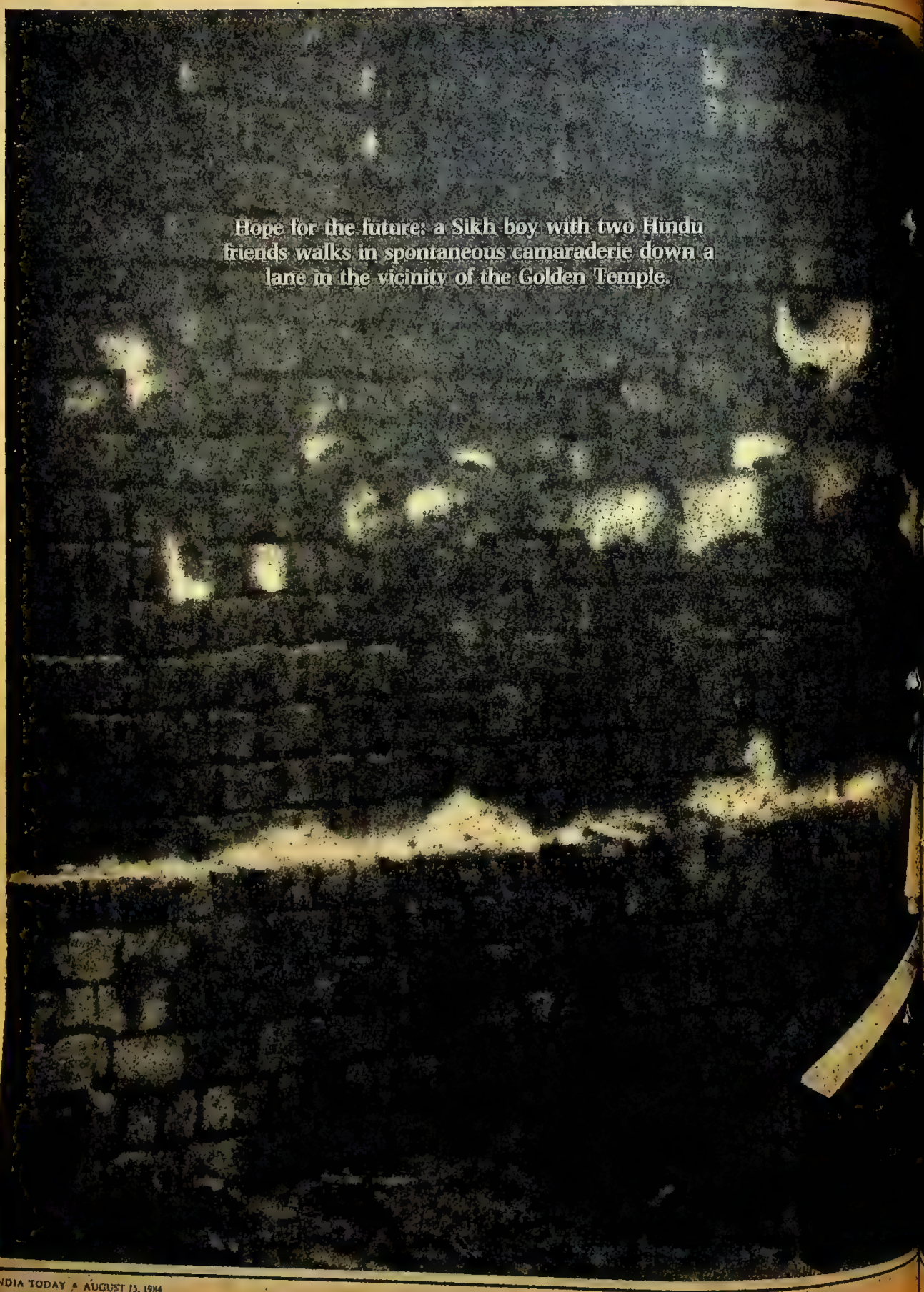




Parikrama floor damaged by tanks being repaired (top) and (below) women curiously peering into the locked rooms along the periphery.







Hope for the future: a Sikh boy with two Hindu friends walks in spontaneous camaraderie down a lane in the vicinity of the Golden Temple.



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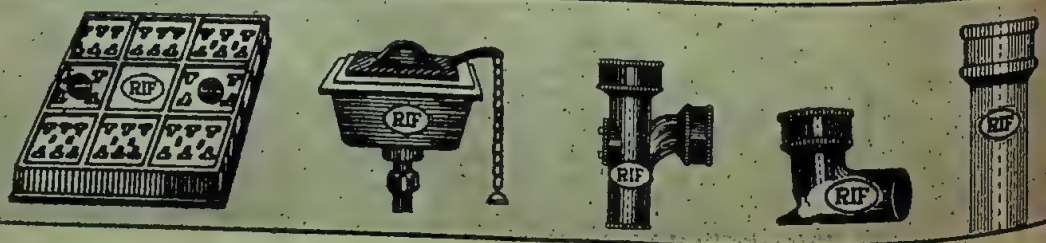


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SPARE TYRES

THE TYRE industry, battling with the prolonged problem of sluggish demand that falls short of production capacity, is now getting ready to orchestrate a planned cut in production by all the major manufacturers. But negotiations on working out a detailed programme have got stuck on the question of how the production cut is to be shared by the different companies. One of the bigger companies has been arguing for rationing production on the basis of installed capacities, but feels that the cuts should be on the basis of actual production achieved during the last few months. A final compromise settlement is yet to be reached, partly because of intense rivalries among some of the large groups that have a stake in the business.

STALLED SALE

THE SALE of Rohtas Industries by Ashok Jain to Sanjay Dalmia (INDIA TODAY, July 15, 1984) has got stalled following a failure to agree on the price at which control of the company should be handed over. Jain has rejected Dalmia's final offer as being too low, and is now believed to be shopping around for other prospective buyers. The price dispute followed from a failure to agree on the calculation of the company's liabilities. However, Dalmia remains confident that it will be difficult to find anyone who will offer more than he has, and hopes to eventually conclude a deal for acquiring the ailing Bihar giant.

SPACE-AGE SCHEME

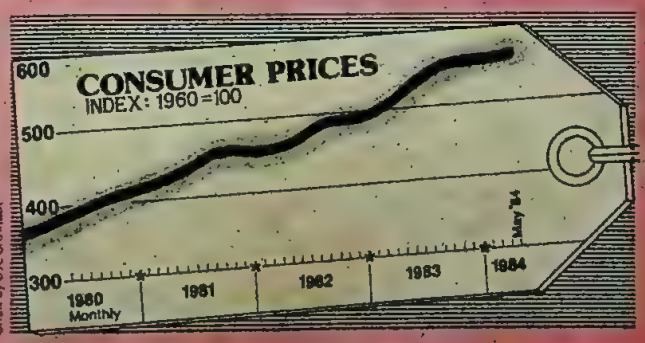
TWO NON-RESIDENT Indian technologists have launched a novel scheme called Indus Technologies Inc to undertake joint Indo-US development of state-of-the-art computer-based products and to provide cost-effective engineering and manufacturing services to the electronics industry. Launched with an initial capital base of Rs 5.5 crore, the project will have a manufacturing and marketing centre in the US, and a central computer sciences institute in the Nilgiris apart from an industrial complex comprising up to 10 joint ventures with established companies. The company proposes to fabricate 256 K memory chips, do custom chip design, manufacture very large scale integrated circuits, work on robots (on which one of the two non-resident promoters is a recognised authority) and also provide a host of software services. The two project locations in the Nilgiris and at Pittsburgh are planned to be linked directly by satellite, using wide band communication.

JAPANESE INVASION

THE JAPANESE invasion of the Indian market for automobile ancillaries and components continues unabated. In recent months Amco Batteries of Bangalore have got government approval for their tie-up with Yuasa Battery Company for motorcycle and industrial batteries, Kalyani Brakes of Pune have got clearance for their technical collaboration with Nippon Air Brake Company for hydraulic brake systems, and a Madras-based company has tied up with Kokusan Danki Co Ltd for magnetos, ignition coils and other items. However, fortunately for other countries, the Japanese don't have a complete monopoly. India Pistons of Madras have gone in for British collaboration for pistons and piston rings.

SINKING SHIP

THE INDIAN shipping industry is almost completely bankrupt: 65 of 67 shipping companies have losses that are larger than their assets and reserves combined, and are being propped up only with government help. But there may be hope yet: the prices of scrap ships have steadily risen in the last six months by about 40 per cent, which should encourage more shipowners to sell their vessels as scrap and reduce the surplus capacity in the global shipping industry. At the same time, the European Economic Community forecasts a 5 per cent increase in world trade this year. Shipping circles in Bombay are, therefore, for the first time in three years, beginning to hope that there will be a genuine upswing in the shipping industry, starting some six months from now. Other factors pointing to an upswing are the 7 per cent increase in Japanese steel production (which means more iron ore, coal and steel movement), and increased trade in foodgrain and animal feed because of the poor Soviet crops. The only factors that can hold back a long-awaited upswing are the Iran-Iraq war, the international debt crisis and the dropping oil prices (which discourage stocking up on petroleum). On balance, however, the present mood is very distinctly optimistic.



SPIRALLING PRICES

CONSUMER prices have risen over 50 per cent since January 1980, the index moving up from 371 then to 562 in May this year. This marks a substantial step-up in the overall rate of inflation, for in the preceding four-and-a-half years the consumer price index had risen by barely 30 per cent. Wholesale prices have similarly risen by roughly 50 per cent since January 1980, once again indicating a faster price increase than during the preceding four-and-a-half years, when the wholesale price index rose by less than 40 per cent.

PLANNING COMMISSION

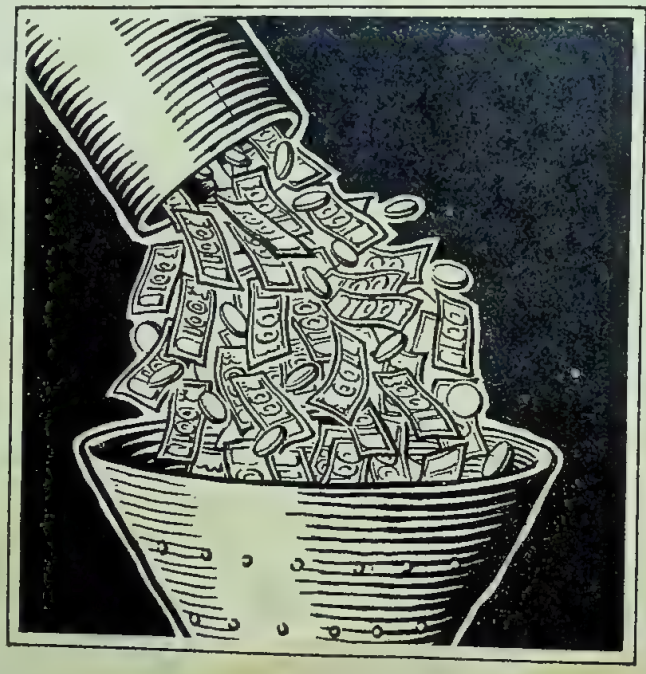
Developing Deadwood



YOJANA Bhavan is quicker at making plans than the Government is at implementing them. They seem to flow effortlessly, like oil in a pipeline, complete with targets worked out to the last decimal point. The Planning Commission boys have also learnt over the years how to market their plans, as something very special and also something very different, as do Indian car makers, even when all they do is to change the shape of the grill, or perhaps the size of the ashtray. The engine, the body, the suspension, everything in fact which makes the car what it is is left untouched. The seventh plan, of which we have seen only an approach paper, is no exception. Like most such documents, it is quite impressive, though the familiar rhetoric about growth and social justice and poverty has worn thin with the years. In fact, the entire planning process has worn threadbare with time and the plans fail to evoke much enthusiasm.

You can't really blame the man in the street for not taking the plans seriously. The seventh plan is being marketed as a special kind of plan, different from all the others that went before it. But there is little in the document to support this claim. All five-year plans have been accompanied by eye-catching slogans about growth and production, and claims of alleviation of poverty and stress on social justice. I do not recall a single plan that was not supposed to bring down the percentage of people below the poverty line and which did not say that one of its main aims was social equality. The seventh plan, which in another six months or so, maybe a year, will be fleshed out in all its finery, is no exception. We have heard all this before. Most of us, who are at the receiving end of the plans, know otherwise.

Let us look at the poverty scenario. The plan is supposed to reduce the population below the poverty line from an estimated 37 per cent at the end of the current (sixth) plan to 23 per cent. Incidentally, the sixth plan is supposed to have brought down the below-poverty line population from 51 to 37 per cent, an astonishingly bold claim which, if true, should be the main point in the ruling party's next election manifesto.



The total public sector outlay will be Rs 180,000 crore representing about 46 per cent of the total outlay. The targets of production are low key.

The reduction of poverty, in a period of marked inflation, by as much as 30 per cent in less than five years sounds too good to be true. The Planning Commission has either revised standards by which poverty is judged or been up to some sharp statistical practices. On either count, there is little evidence that the extent of the poverty in the country has gone down by such a substantial margin.

Let us look at the plan figures. The total public sector outlay will be Rs 180,000 crore, representing about 46 per cent of the total outlay—a step-up from 43 per cent to be attained at the end of the current plan. The targets of production are rather low key, but ambitious nonetheless. Crude oil output is to go up to more than 35 million tonne and steel production to 13 million tonne. Cement production will be of the order of 50 million tonne and electricity generation will increase by nearly two-thirds from 165 to 270 billion units. And all this will add nearly 100 million tonne of extra freight to railway traffic which will then go up from 275 to 375 million tonne.

You do not really require elaborately worked out plans to increase production of goods and services. If you set up more power stations, or more steel plants, you are likely to end up with more power or more steel, even if the power stations (or the steel plants) operate with less efficiency than before. We now produce more electricity than we did ten years ago, simply because we have a bigger power capacity. The same thing goes for the gross national product (GNP) which is higher today than it was five or ten years ago because of the huge investments that have been made, not necessarily because the investments are being utilised more efficiently. The central aim of economic planning should be to enlarge the economic system by improving its performance, not just increase the GNP, or steel or electricity or whatever. An economic plan that does not do that can hardly be called a development plan for there is no real development without intrinsic improvements in the economic system itself.

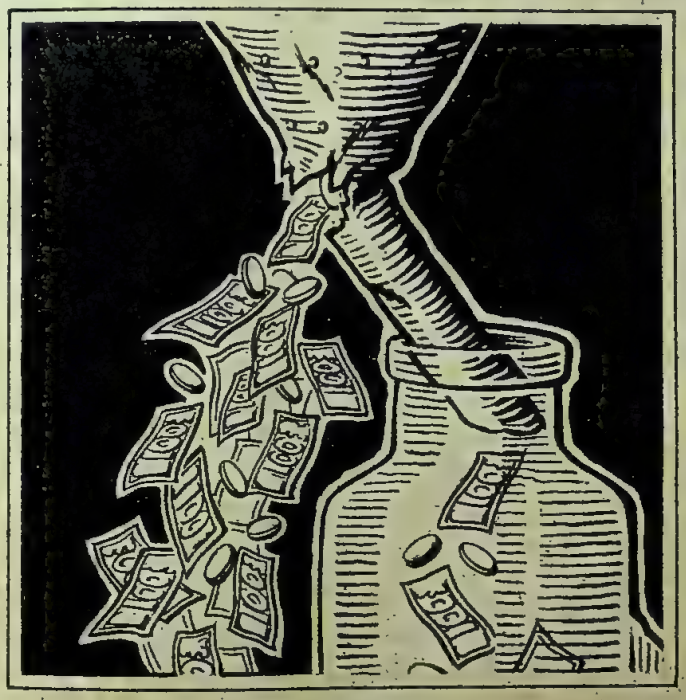
Let us ask a simple question: how will the targets indicated in the plan document be realised? No details have been given but one assumes that the vast outlay in the public sector, amounting to nearly a quarter of the national income every year, will ultimately result in so many more power stations, cement plants and oil wells, not to speak of more wagons and locomotives. The public sector will be expanded to meet the new requirements, possibly with the formation of new corporations, despite the fact that the public sector corporations, as presently organised,

have been found to be both grossly inefficient and wasteful of resources. The planners have not suggested anything to improve the present sorry state of affairs. They have of course said that the working of the undertakings should be improved but this has been said so often and by so many from the prime minister downwards that it doesn't cut much ice any more. I am unable to understand how a rational planning organisation can bring itself to recommend that Rs 180,000 crore worth of national resources should be handed over, on a platter as it were, to a system that is simply not in a position to get the best out of it. The public sector in India is the biggest constraint on growth, and any plan that makes it a lynchpin of economic activity is doomed to failure.

The state undertakings ended 1983-84 with a bare profit of Rs 32 crore against Rs 615 crore earned in the previous year. The losses in the steel sector were the highest—Rs 491 crore, or more than a crore of rupees a day. The coal sector lost Rs 268 crore and the textile mills (run by the National Textile Corporation) Rs 111 crore. This is despite the fact that steel prices have been raised five times in the last six years, and coal prices nine times between 1975 and 1983. The 15 biggest losers in the public sector are responsible for a total loss of Rs 1,000 crore. The larger the size of the public sector the bigger seem to be its losses, and one should not be surprised if, at the end of the seventh plan, the losses should amount to more than Rs 2,000 crore a year, or more than the entire investment in that sector 30 years ago.

What this country needs after 35 years of planning is less of that kind of planning, in fact a long respite from planning, so that the distortions that are plainly slowing down growth are dealt with before the next dose of investment. All growth has its side effects which, after a while, become major constraints on the growth process itself. The public sector is one such constraint. There are others, like the rapid and unrestrained growth of the urban sector and the widening rural-urban divide that is responsible for much of the social and political tension that ultimately flares up in communal riots and other forms of antisocial (and anti-national) behaviour. The third big problem one which the planners have not even touched, is the problem of black money which soaks up anything up to 50 per cent of the national income. Any plan that ignores such a vast chunk of the economy—placed between Rs 50,000 crore and Rs 60,000 crore a year—is no plan at all. It is in fact only half a plan, just as the Union finance minister's budgets are only half budgets, since they deal with only half the economy.

We should, I think, take a holiday from conventional planning and attend to the creaking machine before it breaks down. Firstly, we should decide what to do with the public sector, as the whole system as it has developed over the years may suit the politicians but does not suit the country. We should divide it into three categories: those units which are of strategic importance, like petroleum and atomic energy, for instance; those which are not, like steel (it is only in India that we think of steel as being in the core sector; steel is now what is known as a sunset industry and most countries abroad are now trying to close down steel plants rather than keep them going) which can be handed over to joint managements with private sector men in charge. Thirdly, industries like textiles which should either be jettisoned—we don't need most of them anyway—or handed over back to the private sector for conversion into something more modern and relevant. All countries are doing this kind of industrial restructuring—even Denmark, a tiny country which lives literally on its wits and butter—and it is high time we started doing the same. After 35 years of continuous industrialisation, we have acquired a lot of deadwood that no economy can carry without unnecessary huffing and puffing. I have a hunch that roughly 30 per cent of our industry is out of date or junk or both and should be scrapped.



How can a national planning organisation recommend that Rs180,000 crore worth of national resources be handed over to a system that cannot cope with it.

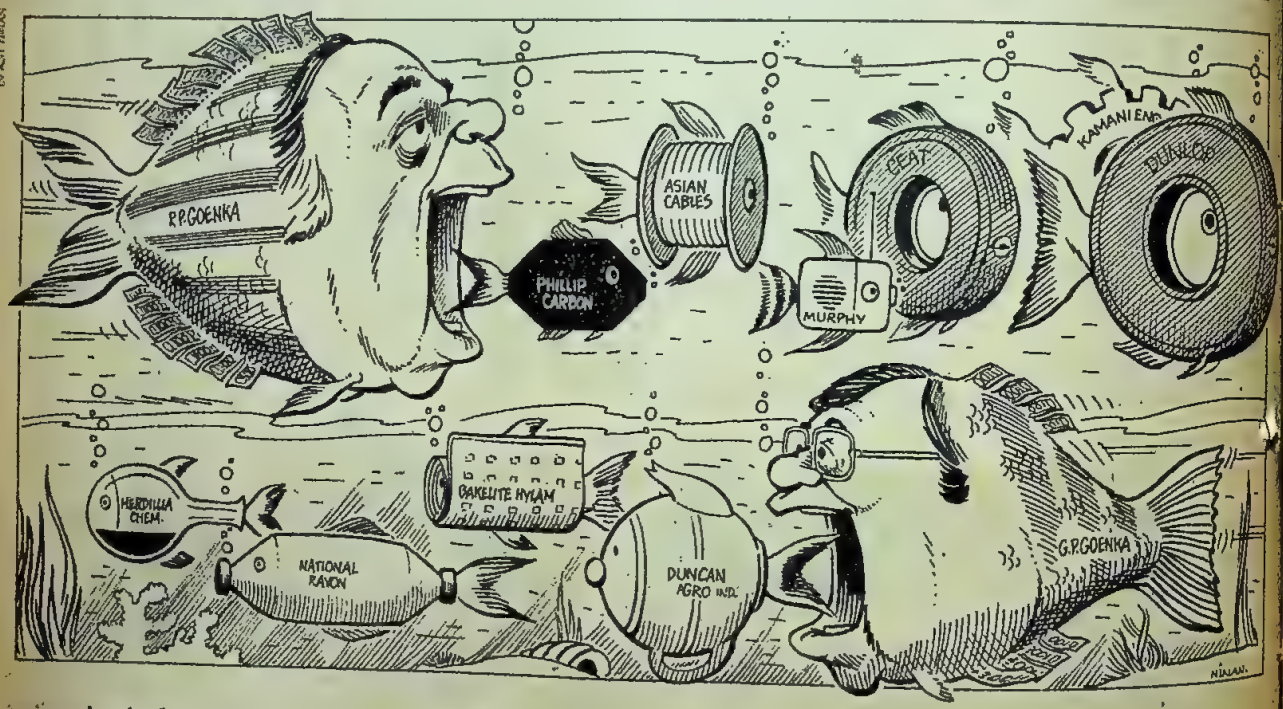
The problems of the urban-rural divide and black money are more complex, for they have political and social dimensions that do not lead to easy solutions. All the three problems are interlinked. The more we industrialise, the worse they seem to get, for the cities grow, if that is the right word, that much faster, and so does the black economy. It makes sense to tackle them together.

Let the Centre and the states get together and appoint three task forces to deal with these three issues. I have mentioned states because, for some reason, they seem to have been kept out of the entire planning process, their representatives being invited to National Development Council meetings to say their set pieces. The state governments also have apparently little interest in planning, except to the extent of getting their favourite projects approved. This is too narrow a view of what planning is all about. The Opposition too should be associated with the task forces, not only because it is the right thing to do but simply to keep the whole thing going after the next elections when there may be an entirely different political set-up at the Centre and the approach to the plan document may be the first casualty if a national government is formed.

THE GOENKAS

Corporate Raiders

BUY THE best. buy Dunlop tyres," said the hoarding en route to Calcutta airport. Take-over wizard Rama Prasad Goenka has done one better: bought Dunlop itself. Beating the Tatas, Birlas, Singhanias and Vijay Mallya to the Rs 320 crore prize, Goenka has pulled off the biggest coup in Indian corporate history with the same élan that has taken him and his two brothers—Gouri Prasad and Jagdish Prasad—unit and leading companies in engineering, pharmaceuticals, cables, jute and tobacco have been added to the family stables since then—a total of 20 take-overs in 25 years, apart from a host of tea companies. In the last three years alone, six headline-hitting corporate take-overs have boosted group sales from Rs 360 crore to over Rs 900 crore, and Dunlop has added another Rs 320 crore, taking them past the magic Rs 1,000 crore mark. That makes the Goenkas race to third position in the corporate sweepstakes, behind only the Tatas and Birlas, who however are still streets ahead with sales totalling between Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 3,000 crore each. But even the Tatas and Birlas can hardly match the Goenka



racing ahead of so many others in the corporate sweepstakes.

The Singhanias were onto Dunlop first, and Goenka in fact got a rebuff from Dunlop Holdings of UK when he first tried to muscle in. But either by bidding more than the initial asking sum of £15 million (Rs 22 crore) for the 40 per cent stake in Dunlop India, or by simply convincing the British sellers that he would be the best man to run the Indian company, Rama Prasad finally edged everybody else out of the ring.

He still denies that the deal has been signed ("The board in UK is yet to discuss the issue," he insists), and Dunlop India's Managing Director J.E.S. Hammond is non-committal ("Dunlop Holdings are under pressure from international bankers to repay bank borrowings, and it is possible that these bankers are suggesting that certain portfolios should be sold. But I am not privy to Dunlop UK's thinking about its future holdings"). Nevertheless, the commercial world has taken it for granted that Rama Prasad has the company in his pocket. After all, it was two full years before anyone knew that the Goenkas had bought Duncan Brothers—their first corporate acquisition back in the late 1950s, and the company that gave them their identity as the Duncan Goenkas.

At one stroke, therefore, the 54-year-old Rama Prasad has added Rs 320 crore to his group's burgeoning sales figures and, since he took control of Ceat Tyres two years ago, he now has command of more than a third of the country's Rs 1,700 crore tyre market. But Dunlop is not the Goenkas' first acquisition, nor will it be their last. For group patriarch Keshav Prasad Goenka (who died last year) and his three sons have been on an almost uninterrupted buying spree since the Duncan take-over in 1959. Five cotton mills, two tyre manufacturing companies, two major chemical companies, a plastic laminates growth in as short a time span as 25 years, for they started their businesses 90 and 70 years ago. Says former Reserve Bank deputy governor R.K. Hazari, who has watched the Goenka growth from his vantage positions on the boards of various financial institutions: "Whatever the company, whether it is Metal Box, ICI, India Cements or Kamani Engineering, they have been in the running for all of them. When the first whiff of a possible sale is felt, you can be sure the Goenkas will be there, ready to swoop in."

Indeed, the Goenkas have a special place in a corporate environment that has been cosy and protected, one where take-overs were quite unusual—until recently. It was the Goenkas who first realised that take-overs were the fastest way to grow.

and who seized on the opportunity presented by industries in which the dominant expatriate interest was on the wane.

But growth in the Goenka group is not restricted to take-overs. Carbon black, other tyre raw materials like bead wire, fibreglass and blades have all been added to the group repertory through the promotion of new ventures. Rama Prasad and Gouri Prasad, 43, plan to set up projects with a total investment cost of over Rs 400 crore in the next three years. Brother Jagdish Prasad, 46, who is not in the same business league and who has not operated on the take-over market on the same scale, nevertheless has an investment programme of Rs 60 crore, and other ventures on the drawing-boards will require investments of around Rs 150 crore. Indeed, Rama Prasad now talks of concentrating on the growth industries of the future: solar energy, electronics, computers, telecommunications. And a book-shelf of his latest readings is peppered with volumes on these subjects and others.

But the Goenkas' true claim to glory comes from their position as the unchallenged supremos of the corporate take-over scene, wolves ready to pounce at the slightest signs of a family dispute or shaky management in any company. Indeed, the brothers are now in a position to set their sights much higher than before, because their asset base is expanding and most of their companies are flush with liquid cash that can be deployed at little more than a moment's notice. Ceat Tyres had Rs 24 crore in cash and short-term deposits when the Goenkas acquired it, and Dunlop's 1982 balance sheet shows cash balances of Rs 18 crore—money that can be used for more take-overs should the opportunity present itself. Gouri Prasad may not have quite so much lying around—he had to say no when Dunlop was offered to him some months ago for £15 million, because he did not have the cash—but some of his big companies have no bank overdrafts and comfortable liquidity positions.

Their increasing corporate clout is now reflected in their standing in the Marwari community. Said B.M. Khaitan, boss of MacNeill and Magor: "In our community we regard them as royalty. They are older than the Birlas, and have a streak of aristocracy that is not to be found in many Marwari families." And Shanti Goenka, once a supplier of tea chests to the Duncan tea companies (but no relation of the family) said: "When my son V.K. took charge of Warren Tea last year, I saw to it that he did not assume office before touching the feet of RPG."

Shanti Goenka also recalls the time when he had set his eyes on a tea-garden in Assam but couldn't rustle up all the money required for the purchase and Rama Prasad helped him out instantly with a large loan. But Rama Prasad is his usual modest self in commenting on his status in the community: "I do not think we are anywhere near the Birlas or Bangurs. And if you talk of a leader of the community, I think that honour should go to N.D. Bangur. However, who does not want to be looked upon as the leader, and God willing I may one day occupy that position."

THE GOENKA business history goes back some five generations. But diversification into industry came only with Keshav Prasad Goenka, whose father, Sir Badri Das Goenka, and his brother, Sir Hari Ram Goenka, were money-lenders and ran the Hind Bank in Calcutta. Determined, along with his then 28-year-old son Rama Prasad, to break into the still selective world of industry, Keshav Prasad moved in on Duncan Brothers when the European agency house failed to honour the loans it had taken from the family bank, in 1959.

This first acquisition, which gained them Anglo-India Jute and the Birpara tea companies, set the stage for future growth. Keshav Prasad was the careful financier, while his daring oldest son scoured the business world for opportunities to expand the group's operations, meeting people, making political and business contacts, keeping his eyes and ears open. "They were a good pair, an effective foil to each other," says youngest son Gouri Prasad. And the series of successive take-overs, the forging of close business alliances with Phillips Petroleum and other groups to launch new ventures, flowed naturally from the partnership (*see list of companies*). But as the three sons came into their own and each sought to carve out his his own place in the large family businesses, a formal split became inevitable.

So, in 1979, the companies were valued, detailed homework done by group executives to assess the true worth of the different units, and finally—in a 20-minute session—the division was carved out. Rama Prasad took Phillips Carbon Black, Asian Cables, Agarpara and Murphy; Jagdish Prasad, seven years his junior, got the textile mills, the newly-formed Oriental Carbon Black, Woolcombers of India and Anglo-India Jute. And Gouri Prasad, then still in his late 30s, got Duncan Agro-Industries (the umbrella company for tea and tobacco operations) and Gujarat Carbon. Said J.P. Goenka: "We thought it would avoid future problems if we divided at that stage. But we still consider the entire group to be one, and the help is always

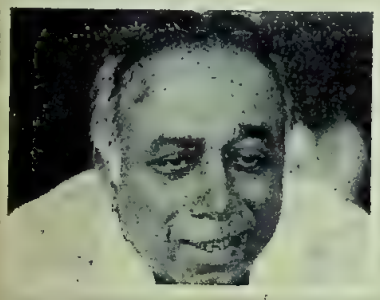
Seven headline-hitting acquisitions in three years have boosted sales from Rs 360 crore to over Rs 1,250 crore, catapulting the Goenkas to third position in the corporate sweepstakes, behind the Tatas and Birlas.



R.P. GOENKA

"I gamble only in companies"

HE READS It's No Sin to Be Rich *by William Davis, apart from Parkinson, Anthony Sampson and books on gold, diamonds and electronics. He also likes to watch films on his video screen, play "sweep" with close associates, and drink a little. But he is no socialite, and consciously eschews any show of corporate power when in his home. In his Bombay office, however, his high-backed chair rests on a raised platform, so that he is always looking down on his visitors across the table. Short, podgy , religious and with a manner that indicates he wouldn't hurt a fly, Rama Prasad Goenka nevertheless suggests the mystery of a man whose depths you cannot plumb.*



RAGHU RAI

Business Editor T.N. NINAN spent an afternoon with him in Calcutta last fortnight, talking to Goenka on a wide range of issues. Some of Goenka's comments:

On his rapid growth:

If I have grown, it is like a tea-shop becoming a hotel. I would say the men to watch in future are L.M. Thapar, Aditya and Chandrakant Birla, and Dhirubhai Ambani. I am not in the same league.

On his political friendships:

I am a humble admirer of Mrs Gandhi. Period. Yes, I am also a friend of Pranab Mukherjee and R.K. Dhawan, but all these go back to the 1950s and 1960s, when these people were not in power. And my friendship was tested during the Janata period. I didn't leave them. Today I still meet Chandrashekhar and Atalji, but they all know that I have only one vote, and that vote will go to Mrs Gandhi.

On the charge that his political friendships help in his business:

One day two disciples ran to Socrates and said, "Master, have you heard what they are saying about your wife?" Socrates asked them, "What are they saying?" But before they could answer, Socrates said: "Let them say." Why should I have to deny unfounded gossip?

On his book collection and leisure activities:

One can understand a person by seeing his library. So I don't show all my books. My leisure is reading, being with my grandchildren, seeing films on video. I don't gamble except in industry.

On his cardinal business principles:

I tell my sons four things. First, don't give a commitment if you can't keep it. A verbal commitment is more important than a written one. Second, one individual can't build anything, so motivate people. Third, opportunity never waits for anyone, so grab it quickly. And fourth, look after your family.

"I have only one vote and that will go to Mrs Gandhi."

On how he spots his corporate prey:

You have to keep your eyes and ears open, and make the first approach gently, subtly.

On how he runs his companies:

I meet my chief executives once a month, and get weekly reports from them. I am thinking of making these reports fortnightly. I don't believe in getting daily reports.

On his next projects:

There is great scope in telecommunications, solar energy, electronics and computers. I have tied up some collaborations in these areas, and have been assured government clearance.

On how he judges a profitable investment:

If the pay-back is three years, I am lucky. If it is five years, it is okay. Beyond that....

available to anyone who wants it."

The split did not entirely avoid problems: for some time after 1979, there was considerable tension and even hostility among the brothers as they began competing against one another. At one stage, Rama Prasad and Gouri Prasad were bidding furiously against each other for the acquisition of Bakelite Hylam. But this particular incident eventually led to a truce, and in recent months even a good measure of cordiality, with the understanding that the two brothers would not bid against one another in take-over deals.

The split in fact gave each brother his head. By the end of 1979, Jagdish Prasad had taken over the Ahmedabad-based Aryodaya textile mills, while Rama Prasad set up two companies, the Rs 18 crore Deccan Fibre Glass and Wiltech, a small but high-profile razor-blade unit in collaboration with Wilkinson, before launching his trail-blazing acquisition of Ceat, the controversial pocketing of Kamani Engineering and the spectacular but abortive raid on Premier Automobiles. Gouri Prasad first set about putting his tobacco operations on even keel, fighting the enormous market power of cigarette giant ITC to take sales from 175 million cigarette sticks a month in 1977 to 950 million in 1982, before announcing to the world in no uncertain manner that he too had arrived, through a blitz of three take-overs in a hurricane 15 months: National Rayon, Herdillia Chemicals and Bakelite Hylam.

These acquisitions since 1981 have put earlier Goenka operations in the shade as the brothers have prowled ceaselessly through the murky depths of the take-over market, snapping up huge corporations with all the effort it takes to digest a mid-morning snack. But this period has also shown up the winners and



PRADIP SAHA

the also-rans. Everyone acknowledges that Rama Prasad is in a class by himself, while Gouri Prasad took time to establish himself but has now shown the world what he can do on his own. Only Jagdish Prasad has proved the relative laggard, partly because he is stuck with jute and textile companies that show little growth potential and partly because he alone among the three brothers has taken time out to develop serious non-business interests: horses, paintings, antiques. The real take-over tycoons are therefore the oldest and the youngest brother.

How have the Goenkas proved such successful corporate raiders? Why did they succeed where so many larger houses have failed?

There is no simple answer, because the whole truth about take-over deals is never known. But fundamental to the Goenka scheme of things has been their enormous clout with the Government, and Rama Prasad's self confessed admiration for Mrs Gandhi, and his friendship with Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and the prime minister's Special Assistant, R.K. Dhawan. He dismisses any suggestion of these friendships having helped him in his business deals with a single word: "Nonsense." Few will take that at face value, but Rama Prasad will not go beyond saying: "You may expect marginal latitude from a favourable government, but no government will go beyond that. Dhawan is not going to ring up an officer and say 'Do this, it is Goenka's work.'"

However, there can be little denying that the Government has chosen to look the other way when the Goenkas were concluding deals to which there may be more than meets the eye. And the Government-owned financial institutions have, on more than one occasion, helped both Rama Prasad and Gouri Prasad in their take-over bids.

Thus, corporate watchers point out that when Ceat Pneumatici of Italy decided to reduce its holding in Ceat Tyres of India from 50 to 39 per cent, they were allowed to pass the entire 11 per cent shares to Rama Prasad, while in other similar instances the seller was always asked to sell either to the general public or to the financial institutions. Also, Goenka got control of Ceat by paying just Rs 1.19 crore for the shares at a time when he had liquid cash reserves of Rs 24 crore salted away in bank deposits and loans on the inter-corporate market.

Asked how he got control with 11 per cent holding, when Ceat held 39 per cent, Rama Prasad insists even today that he does not have full control, that the Italian company has to be consulted on all important decisions, and that a senior Italian executive helps run the company. But there is no getting away from the fact that Goenka has done precisely what he wanted to do with Ceat immediately after the share acquisition, he set up three subsidiary investment companies, loaned them over Rs 5 crore from the parent company, and proceeded to launch take-over bids for Kamani Engineering and Premier Automobiles.

Ceat funds have also been used to buy shares in Duncan Brothers, Asian Cables, Wiltech, Gladstone Lyall and a string of other Goenka companies, while Ceat has now gone in for technical col-

Takeover Tableau

YEAR OF TAKE-OVER	COMPANIES	RUN BY	GROSS TURNOVER (Rs. crores)
1959	Duncan Brothers	Joint	1.2
1959	Duncan International	J.P.	30
1959	Birpara Tea	G.P.	Merged with Duncan Agro Industries
1959	Anglo-India Jute	J.P.	38.5 + 4.4 (subsidiaries)
1959	*Woolcombers of India	J.P.	6 + 3.3 (subsidiaries)
1960	*Phillips Carbon Black	R.P.	33.5
1961	*Schraeder-Scovill Duncan	J.P.	5.9
1962	*National Standard Duncan	G.P.	3.2
1963	Coorla Mills	J.P.	Merged with Swan Mills
1966	Asian Cables	R.P.	20.3
1968	Jubilee Mills	J.P.	Merged with Swan Mills
1968	Balmer Lawrie	Joint	Sold to Government
1973	Swan Mills	J.P.	43.6
1973	The Agarpara Company	R.P.	12.3
1973	National Tobacco Company	G.P.	Merged with Duncan Agro Industries
1974 Nov.-1976 July	Six Sterling Tea Companies	G.P.	Merged with Duncan Agro Industries
1974	Murphy India	R.P.	16
1977	*Duncan Agro Industries	G.P.	166
1978	*Oriental Carbon Black	J.P.	19.9
1978	*Dharuhera Chemicals	J.P.	1.6
1979	Aryodaya Ginning Mills	J.P.	16.8
1979	*Gujarat Carbon	G.P.	18.8
1979	*Deccan Fibre Glass	R.P.	Merged with Ceat Tyres
1981	*Wiltech Blades	R.P.	2.7
1981	Ceat Tyres	R.P.	258.6
1982	Kamani Engineering	R.P.	69.7
1982	Bakelite Hylam	G.P.	30.6
1983	Searle (India)	R.P.	13.5
1983	National Rayon Corporation	G.P.	94.8
1984	Herdillia Chemicals	G.P.	44
1984	Dunlop India	R.P.	341.4 + 18.9 (subsidiaries)
1984	Alfred Herbert (India)	G.P.	13.5

(*promoted by the Goenkas)

(From left) Dunlop, Duncan and Ceat headquarters in Calcutta and Bombay





NAMAS BHOJANI

laboration with the Japanese Yokohama Rubber Company. All these suggest that the original Italian parent company does not have the commanding holding that is shown in the books, and virtually the entire business world believes that Goenka has a greater stake in the company than he has declared. But he himself dismisses all such speculation with one comment: "I play straight."

In the case of Gouri Prasad's takeovers of Herdillia Chemicals and Bakelite Hylam, the foreign principals did not even receive the token Rs 1.19 crore that Ceat Got. He bought 8.5 per cent of Bakelite Hylam from Best and Crompton, and the British Petroleum subsidiary—Bakelite Xylonite Ltd Plastic Manufacturing Group—which owns 40 per cent, promptly gave him the reins of management. In Herdillia, he bought 9.5 per cent from E.I.D. Parry, "gained the confidence of Hercules Power and British Petroleum, which own 45 per cent", and took charge. Soon after Rama Prasad bought 10 per cent of the Kamani Engineering equity in a Bombay High Court auction—the institutions hold 51 per cent—he was invited to become a director along with another nominee. Later, the company's professional management, which had put in a spectacular performance, was eased out for Goenka to move in.

Finally, in National Rayon, Gouri Prasad was made a director within days of the acquisition last August of a 22 per cent block of shares from chemicals trader Vijay Berlia and his associates. Berlia had tried in vain for six years to get proper board representation but failed, and last fortnight he charged the Government with conniving to keep him out of the company, and said that he had received feelers from highly-placed government officials as early as 1981, suggesting that he sell his holdings to the Goenkas.

The Goenkas have their explanations, of course. Gouri Prasad says "Berlia had some 72 legal cases against National Rayon, so the institutions did not want to give him control," and Rama Prasad says with reference to Kamani that "this is one case where the Government did not play its role. They could have given me the management two years earlier." But the Berlia cases only followed from the earlier refusal to register his share purchases, and Rama Prasad will not comment on why he should have been given the Kamani management at all, retreating into his shell with the enigmatic comment: "I don't know if the management is mine."

Indeed, he explains his success in getting government approvals by saying that "I try to present issues to the Government in such a manner that it will not be difficult to approve," and cites the Dunlop instance. He has not sought to buy all 40 per cent shares himself, for



R.P. Goenka (right) and brother Gouri Prasad: insatiable appetite

that would immediately run into problems with the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act. Instead, he has brought together a consortium of three non-resident Indians who will buy the shares, while he himself will have only a small stake. But, inevitably, this too has set off speculation in the business community about the identity of the non-residents.

The real importance of political connections was especially clear during the Janata regime, when the entire clan was under a cloud, and Gouri Prasad says: "We could hardly go to Delhi because no one was willing to meet us." Rama Prasad was in fact arrested for a day on the charge of using pressure to collect political funds from businessmen, and his houses and offices were raided 43 times during a two-year period, a fact that he recalls with some bitterness. "The walls and ceilings of this house were broken down, and these sofa covers ripped apart." Then he adds immediately with a dour chuckle: "They were looking for the hidden Congress(I) treasure. What did they find? Nothing."

More important, the Janata government made sure that he was not allowed to buy Remington Rand shares from the parent Sperry Rand abroad, and a deal to buy the Assam Frontier Tea Company came unstuck because the Government refused to give clearance. During the entire Janata period from 1977 to 1980, the Goenkas were one industrial group which did not get government sanction for a single industrial licence. Harking back to those days, Rama Prasad says: "I am by nature a high flier. But that experience taught me to walk on earth, not fly." Nevertheless, with the Congress(I) back in power, and running the Government for over four years, the Goenkas have flourished like never before, and Rama Prasad is flying high once again in friendly skies.

But Government support and the ability to get around bureaucratic stumbling blocks, while they have certainly been a key factor in the Goenkas' growth, do not tell the whole story. The Goenkas combine the savvy of the Marwari community with an uncompromising commitment to running their companies. Both in the choosing of their take-over targets and in the way they subsequently operate them, they have proved that there is more to the success formula than just political muscle. Although the jute and cotton textile companies are currently in the red because of the depressed market conditions, 25 years of unrestrained gobbling have produced hardly any failures, and even the mill companies are among the best in their industries.

Take-over candidates are carefully

identified, and the preliminary spade-work is generally meticulous. Said merchant banker Nimesh Kampani, whose I.M. Financial Consultancy has fronted for the Goenkas on certain deals in Bombay: "R.P. Goenka is very thorough in his assessment of companies, and his staff go into great detail to analyse performance and potential. But once he is sure of a company he is a very quick decision maker and takes very fast and risky decisions".

A critical factor in selecting a take-over candidate is liquidity. Rarely, as in Asian Cables and Murphy India, do the Goenkas touch companies which do not have cash reserves which can be used for further raids.

Birla managers, and top executives from other large houses too, insist that the Goenkas are merely raiders and not managers, and charge the brothers with merely using purchases to finance purchases. But there is also more to the group's record. Sick units like Murphy India and Asian Cables were turned around by R.P. Goenka, and the performance record of other group companies is both prudent and profitable. The Carbon Black companies are all profitable, and most companies show comfortable reserves positions.

The companies under G.P. Goenka's control are equally sound. Duncan Agro had reserves in 1982 that were almost three times as large as its equity, and asset revaluation last year pushed this to 12 times the equity. Apart from significant successes on the marketing front, G.P. Goenka has shown his ability for long-term management. Duncan Agro today has tea plantation yields of 2,400 kg per hectare, almost twice the industry average of 1,400 kg. J.P. Goenka's companies too are leaders in their fields, but severely adverse markets have driven his major units, Swan Mills and Anglo-India Jute, into the red.

If both Rama Prasad and Gouri Prasad have been successful managers, their styles nevertheless are almost a study in contrast. Rama Prasad has neither the time nor the patience for the details of day to day management, and confines himself to meeting each of his senior chief executives once a month for day-long sessions, and then meeting them all together for a tenth day. "For the rest of my time, I am a free-lancer," he says, and he shuttles from city to city, and country to country, thinking up new ideas, keeping his ears close to the ground for possible opportunities.

Gouri Prasad, in contrast, is the conscientious manager, making lists of things that have to be done daily, buckling down to managerial tasks like turning around National Tobacco and modernising the tea-gardens. And he says: "I try to meet my senior executives as often as I can." His record shows in the way he aggressively launched best-selling cigarette brands like No. 10 filter and Regent Special filter, the way in which he brought a new management team into National Tobacco, and the way in which he has broken into the packaged tea market against stiff competition from such established giants as Brooke Bond and Lipton. Today, 80 per cent of Agro-Industries' tea production is packed at the gardens, and brands like Double Diamond and Gold Cup have found their niche in the market.



J.P. Goenka (right) on the racecourse: non-business interests

Rama Prasad will now have his hands full in improving Dunlop's indifferent record. The company had profits of Rs 5.7 crore last year, low on a turnover of Rs 320 crore. And gross sales per employee last year were only Rs 2.9 lakh, against Rs 5.5 lakh in Ceat and Rs 5.1 lakh in Modi Rubber. Asked how he would correct this Goenka merely said: "We are now in the pre-takeover stage and concerned with its problems. The problems of the post-takeover stage will be dealt with when the time comes."

However, he was aware of what he was taking on. "Dunlop is not just a company, it is an institution, and we will have to give confidence to the people working there." He added: "I am not taking Dunlop for myself, but for my younger son, Sanjeev, 24, who is now running the fibreglass unit in Hyderabad. He is going to Geneva for an MBA course, and will need a metropolitan base when he gets back." As coming-of-age gifts go, Dunlop is not a bad deal. Rama Prasad himself did not start with such an enormous asset base, and he owes his success partly to an abundant display of modesty. Senior executives are not summoned to the bosses' room; instead, Rama Prasad or Harsh Vardhan will often walk across to the executive's office.

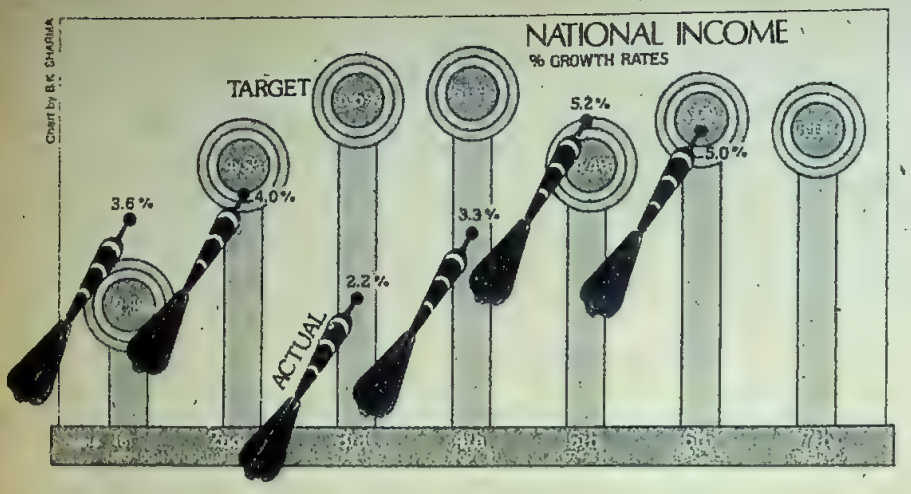
But behind this meekness, there lies the aggressive predatoriness of the shark; indeed, the humility often puts people off guard, and a Calcutta industrialist said: "You never know where exactly you stand with R.P. He could be cutting your throat, but you won't know it till the knife is half-way across your neck".

One man who realised what was happening just in time was Vinod Doshi of Premier Automobiles. Rama Prasad had bought a greater stake in the company than the Doshi family and seemed to be readying to move in when Doshi mounted a fierce counter-campaign, lobbied intensely for political support, and finally forced Rama Prasad to submit to the decision of an arbitrator, who asked Goenka to sell out. This was one of his few failures on the take-over market, another being Bombay Dyeing back in 1972, where the deal was signed and sealed before the company owner, Neville Wadia, developed second thoughts and wanted to cancel the contract. Rama Prasad allowed him to do so with the simple explanation today that "that is the kind of man I am."

Asked about the Premier deal, he says he had no designs on taking over the management of the company, and insists that he has no regrets. "I only wanted to buy a dress circle seat, not a place on the stage. But do you weep because you find a 'house full' sign?"

Clearly, the take-over game is going to continue, and the Goenka brothers will continue to stalk the corporate world for fresh prey, deploying their enormous financial muscle, their even more impressive political clout, their razor-sharp business minds and their insatiable appetite for industrial fodder.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH with bureau reports



SEVENTH PLAN

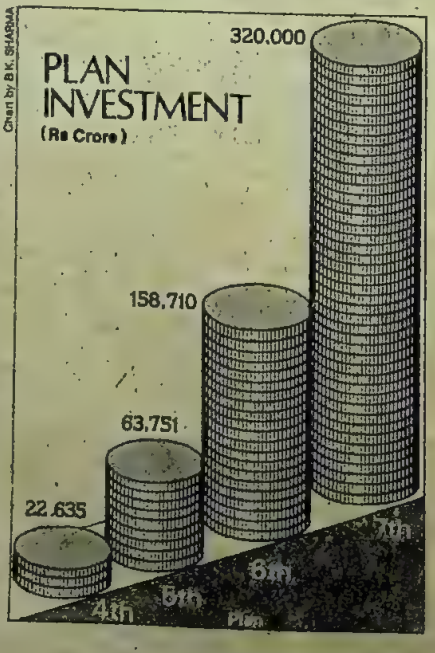
Unoriginal Approach

SOME of the numbers are bigger, but much of the rhetoric is the same. So it was not surprising when the release last fortnight of the approach paper to the Seventh Five-Year Plan, due to be launched next April, was greeted with *deja vu*. Apart from the increase in the size of plan investment, from Rs 158,710 crore in the sixth plan to Rs 320,000 crore in the seventh, the planners had little new to offer the National Development Council, which nevertheless met and approved the approach paper last fortnight.

The approach paper to the seventh plan lists 10 "important features" of the plan, whereas the sixth plan, launched in 1980, had a 12-point list of "major areas of effort". Indeed, the closer anyone looked at the two lists, the more similar they seemed.

The new document talks of "full public participation in development", the old one mentioned "promoting the active involvement of all sections of people in the process of development". The approach paper talks of "reduction in inter-class, inter-regional and rural-urban disparities" whereas the last plan aimed at a "reduction in regional inequalities". One document talks of the "voluntary acceptance of a small family norm", and the other of "voluntary adoption". Both the 10-point list and the 12-point list talk of self-reliance, of reducing poverty and promoting employment, of achieving greater efficiency and productivity. The sixth plan talked of "protection and improvement of ecological and environmental assets" whereas the new approach document mentions "ecological and environmental conservation". Both also talk of "conservation of energy".

Some of this repetition may be inescapable, because planning goals do not change over five years. And the new plan paper seeks to specially emphasise food, work and productivity as its central themes, along with the frontal attack on poverty. But a repetition of problems and goals right through the 38 pages of the approach paper suggests that many old problems remain. So there is talk once again of land reforms, of restructuring the state electricity boards, of reducing the dependence on oil, of not starting new projects till old ones are complete, of removing infrastructural bottle-necks, of bringing down the overdues of co-operative societies, and much else.



There is, however, some reason for cheer. The sixth plan has not done too badly in many areas, and the overall economic growth at 5 per cent since 1979-80 is close to the plan target of 5.2 per cent. In numerous sectors, actual production by plan-end next March will have either reached or exceeded the goals that had been set. Foodgrain output will be within a whisker of the target of 149-154 million tonnes, as will be the production of items like oilseeds and cotton. In the industrial sphere, there has been a rapid expansion of capacities in cement, chemical fertiliser, paper and commercial vehicles, so that production will virtually match the targets in these and other areas. In some sectors, like oil and two-wheelers, production will in fact be well ahead of the targets that had been set. And despite slippages in areas like saleable steel, aluminium, railway traffic and—most important—electricity, the overall figures show that the economy is now growing at a faster rate than had been the case a decade ago.

If this solid achievement forms the base on which the seventh plan proposes to build, many of its goals are surprisingly modest. The target for economic growth is fixed at "over 5 per cent" whereas the sixth plan document had talked of growth after 1985 climbing to between 5.5 and 6 per cent. The growth of population is expected to be 1.8 per cent, showing no progress from the rate assumed for the last five years. And there may well be a problem caused by the unexpected drop in the savings rate that occurred in the first three years of the sixth plan.

For private industry, the approach document holds out some promise of favourable action. There is a mention of restructuring industrial policy, moving from administrative to financial controls, of allowing private oil exploration and a greater role in the communications field. The urban land ceiling law may undergo change, and competition will be encouraged in industry, but the comments on foreign trade policy show caution rather than adventurism.

Whether these and other departures will finally amount to much, and whether the agricultural and industrial growth rates will perk up to 4 and 7 per cent respectively, will eventually determine whether the current sense of *deja vu* will disappear by the end of the seventh plan.

—T.N NINAN

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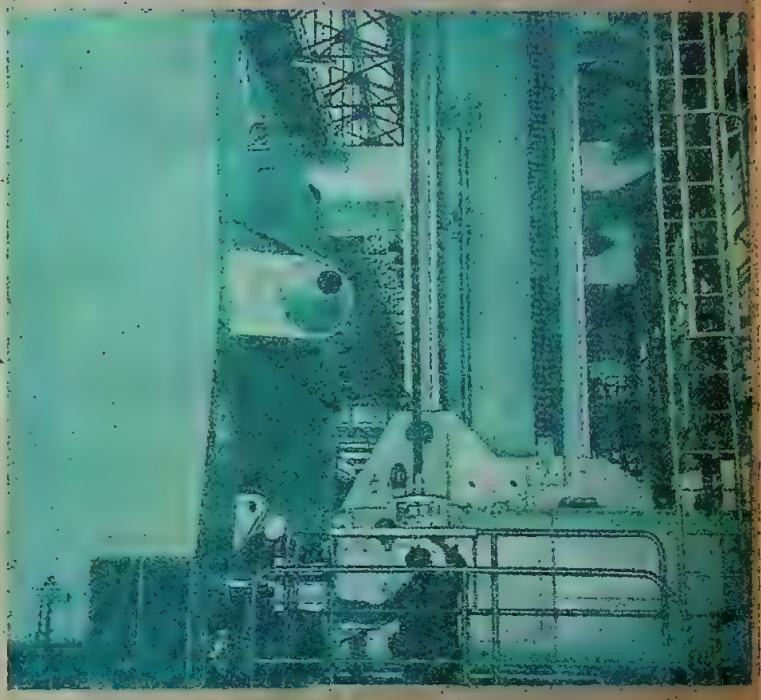
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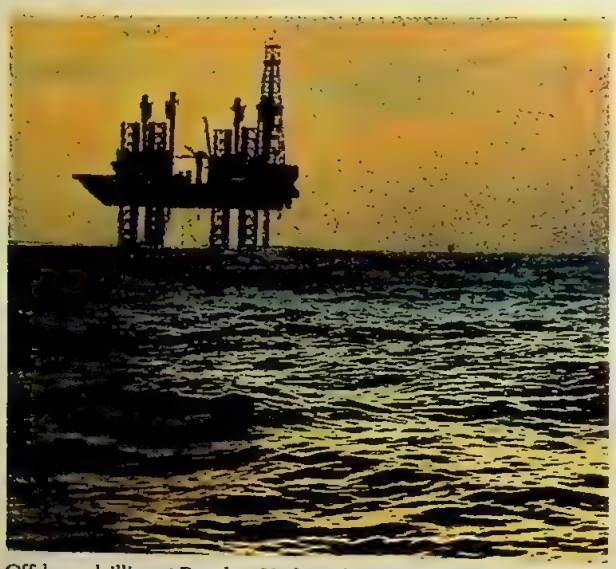
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SOLAR ENERGY

Here Comes the Sun

WHAT DO remote villages in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Ladakh, rural railway stations, Bombay High oil platforms, five-star hotels in Delhi, textile mills in Bombay and Kanpur and hospitals in Delhi and Ujjain have in common? Answer: solar power.

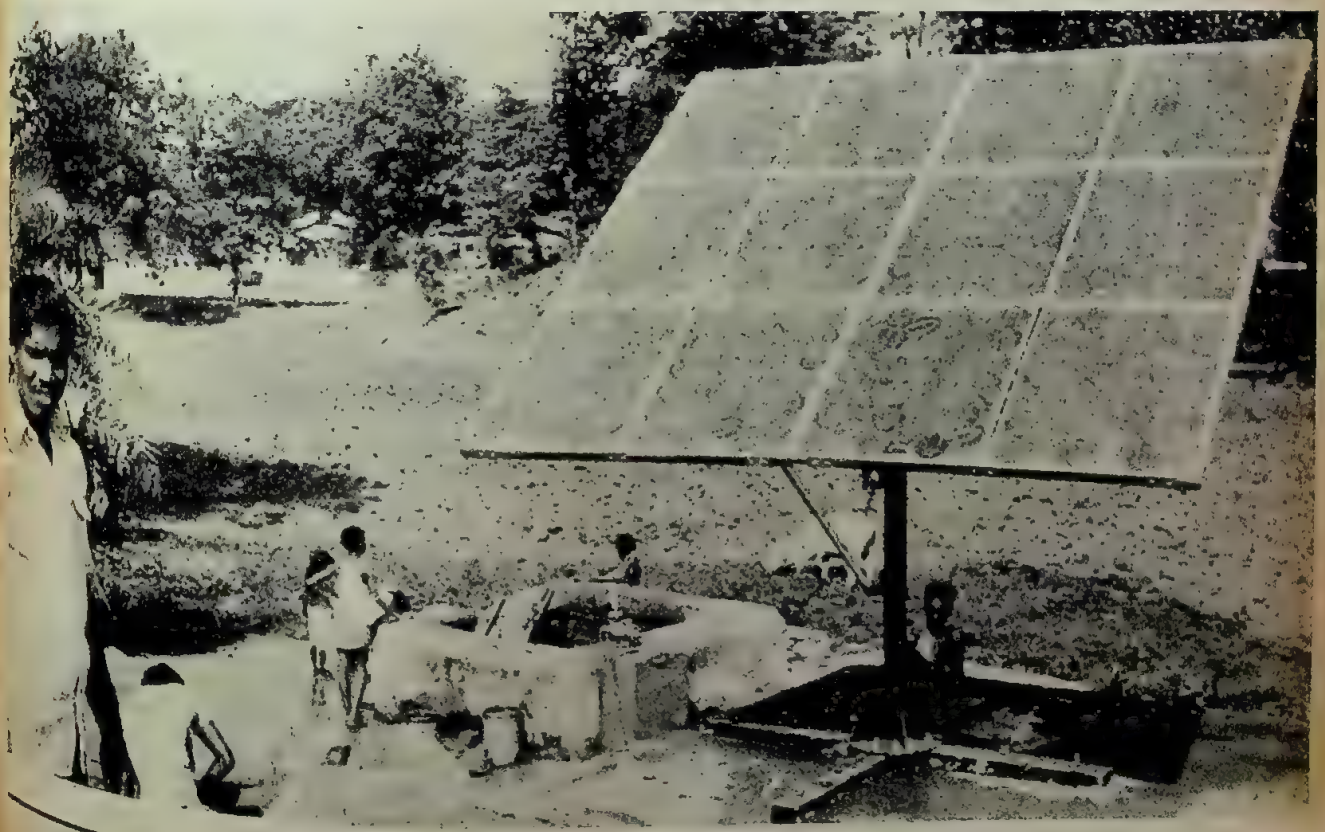
Increasingly, the national landscape is dotted with solar-powered street lights, pumps, water heating systems and TV sets. And companies are rushing in for the pickings: the number of solar cooker manufacturers has shot up in one year from 27 to 39. The total number of solar equipment producers already adds up to 69, including such well-known names as Hindustan Brown Boveri (HBB), Spencer & Co., Advani Oerlikon, Best and Crompton Engineering and Tungabhadra Steel, apart from four public sector companies and the industry pioneer, Jyoti Ltd of Baroda. In addition, Duncan Brothers has submitted a proposal to the Government to make solar cell panels.

The total pickings were small at between Rs 6 crore and Rs 7 crore last year, but they are expected to shoot up to Rs 50 crore this year. And almost everyone expects the nascent industry to take off more decisively in the near future. Manufacturers are making sure they get in on the ground floor.

The Government is helping the growth along through a substantially expanded outlay during the seventh plan (1985-90). At Rs 150 crore, official expenditure on solar energy will be 15 times the outlay in the sixth plan, while a series of financial concessions include subsidies introduced three months ago, which in some cases pay for up to half the price of solar equipment. Says Maheshwar Dayal, secretary of the Department of Non-conventional Energy Sources: "Subsidies have been coupled with quick depreciation, and exemption from excise duties and sales tax in some states." Manufacturers have the further attraction of not needing any licences under the Industries (Development and Regulations) Act, while soft loans are available virtually on tap for those who are prepared to buy the equipment.

Of course, there are problems that could cloud an otherwise sunny future: mainly, the high cost of solar equipment. Photo-voltaic cells, which catch the sun's rays and form the heart of solar energy systems, now cost anywhere between Rs 130 and Rs 180 per watt of electricity generating capacity, as against just Rs 10 for conventional thermal electricity systems. This is accounted for by the high cost of silicon wafers, which are imported to make photo-voltaic cells, plus inflated prices for chemicals and other inputs. Y.T. Madan, general manager of the public sector Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL), which is making a major foray into solar power, says: "The prices of wafers alone have risen from Rs 25 to Rs 40 per watt because of the world-wide scramble for them." Further problems are added by the costly nature of wafer technology.

But larger production runs, automation and updated know-how are expected to sharply lower production costs, and T.K. Bhattacharya, project manager of Central Electronics Ltd's (CEL) national solar photo-voltaic energy demonstration programme, says: "We believe we can sell photo-voltaics at half the present price once we expand our capacity." This may still not be low enough, but Dayal argues that solar



A village solar pumping system in Madhya Pradesh's Bastar district

power is competitive with conventional electricity in remote villages that are far from a grid. Also, it has no recurring or operating costs, and will save the country substantial quantities of furnace oil, coal and electricity. "The initial cost of solar power is fairly high, but not when you take into account the running costs and investments in power plants and transmission lines that are otherwise required," he adds.

Certainly, the growth of the market provides some underpinning for Dayal's arguments. Jyoti has sold 300 solar cookers so far, but expects to vend another 3,000 this year alone by introducing a cheaper model, says the company's senior development engineer, A.K. Varshney. The company's total turnover for solar equipment has meanwhile risen from a very modest Rs 26 lakh in 1980-81 to a more respectable Rs 1.86 crore last year, most of it accounted for by hot water systems. Advani Oerlikon is also selling solar water heating systems, while HBB has got a letter of intent to make 1,000 more systems.

The two public sector giants, BHEL and CEL, have their own ambitious expansion plans. CEL will be stepping up its annual photo-voltaic cell production capacity from 0.6 mw to 5 mw, while BHEL will move from 0.25 mw to 2 mw in the next two years. Jyoti, which finds it difficult to get cells at an affordable price, is also throwing its hat into the ring. And a massive new silicon-manufacturing unit is due to come up in Baroda, mainly to feed the solar energy industry.

Many of the companies that have entered the business are still small-scale operators, while even the big companies have only a token place so far in a field whose full potential is yet to be exploited. But the big boys of industry find that other areas of the energy industry are closed to them and are anxious to spread their wings. Many of them are still marking time, and HBB's corporate planning manager, Yogendra J. Desai, says: "I don't think profits are high. It's for market development purposes that companies have entered the field."

The optimistic forecasts about market growth also hinge on the Government continuing with its hefty subsidies, which are grounded in the premise that unlike in the case of conventional electricity, it is the consumer who pays for the capital investment in solar equipment. This may be a questionable logic, but as long as the subsidies remain, the private sector will make hay while the sun shines.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

BEML

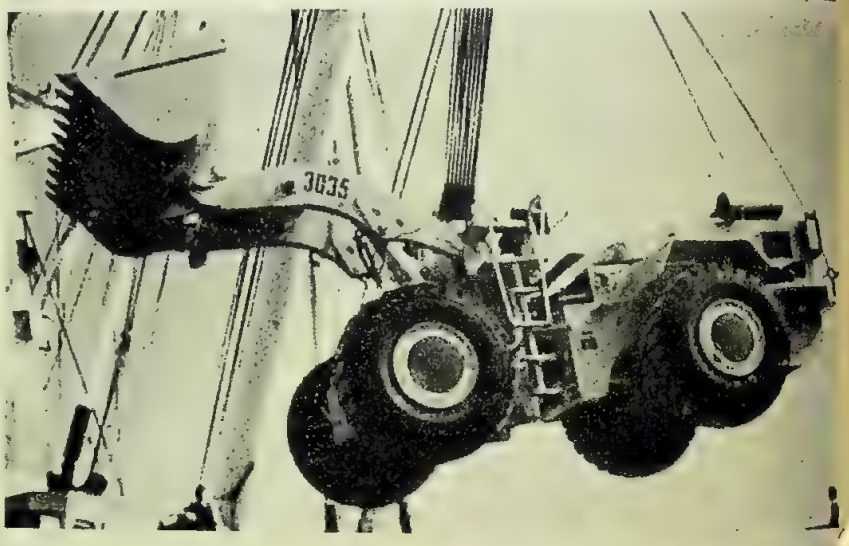
Out of the Slump

FOUR YEARS ago, the Bangalore-based public sector Bharat Earth Movers Ltd (BEML)—which makes railway coaches and earth-moving equipment—was crawling along at a leisurely pace with a slow increase in business and modest profits. But in one of the more remarkable bursts of effort by a public sector company, BEML has since then bulldozed its way to a place among the top 10 profit-earners in the public sector and recorded a pace of growth that few in even the private sector can match.

The turnover last year, at Rs 383.4 crore, was more than three times the 1979-80 turnover of Rs 120 crore, and post-tax profits similarly had almost trebled to Rs 21.16 crore, while pre-tax profits were a record Rs 40.2 crore. In New Delhi, a senior official of the Bureau of Public Enterprises, which monitors the progress of public sector companies, said enthusiastically: "I would rate BEML today as one of the top five performers in the public sector."

BEML's success has come after the silver-haired retired major-general, Som Nath Bhaskar, took over as chairman and managing director, four years ago, immediately after he had retired from the army. Before Bhaskar took charge, production schedules in the company were lax, overtime payments to employees were high, and marketing was given low priority. To add to the problems, immediately after Bhaskar moved in, BEML and four other Bangalore-based public enterprises went on a 77-day strike that saw production fall steeply and the profit curve plunge to half its previous level. Around the same time, Coal India Ltd was rapidly expanding and needed plenty of earth-moving equipment. The big question was whether BEML would gear itself to meet the new demand.

It finally did, but not until some radical changes were implemented. Bhaskar quickly put an end to all overtime payments, and introduced instead an incentive scheme that gave employees between Rs 200 and Rs 300 per month extra if they worked hard enough. He then set about breaking the nexus between the union leaders and employees by introducing an





After Som Nath Bhaskar took over as chairman, the results have been dramatic. Apart from the sharp increase in turnover and profit, the value of production per employee has trebled.

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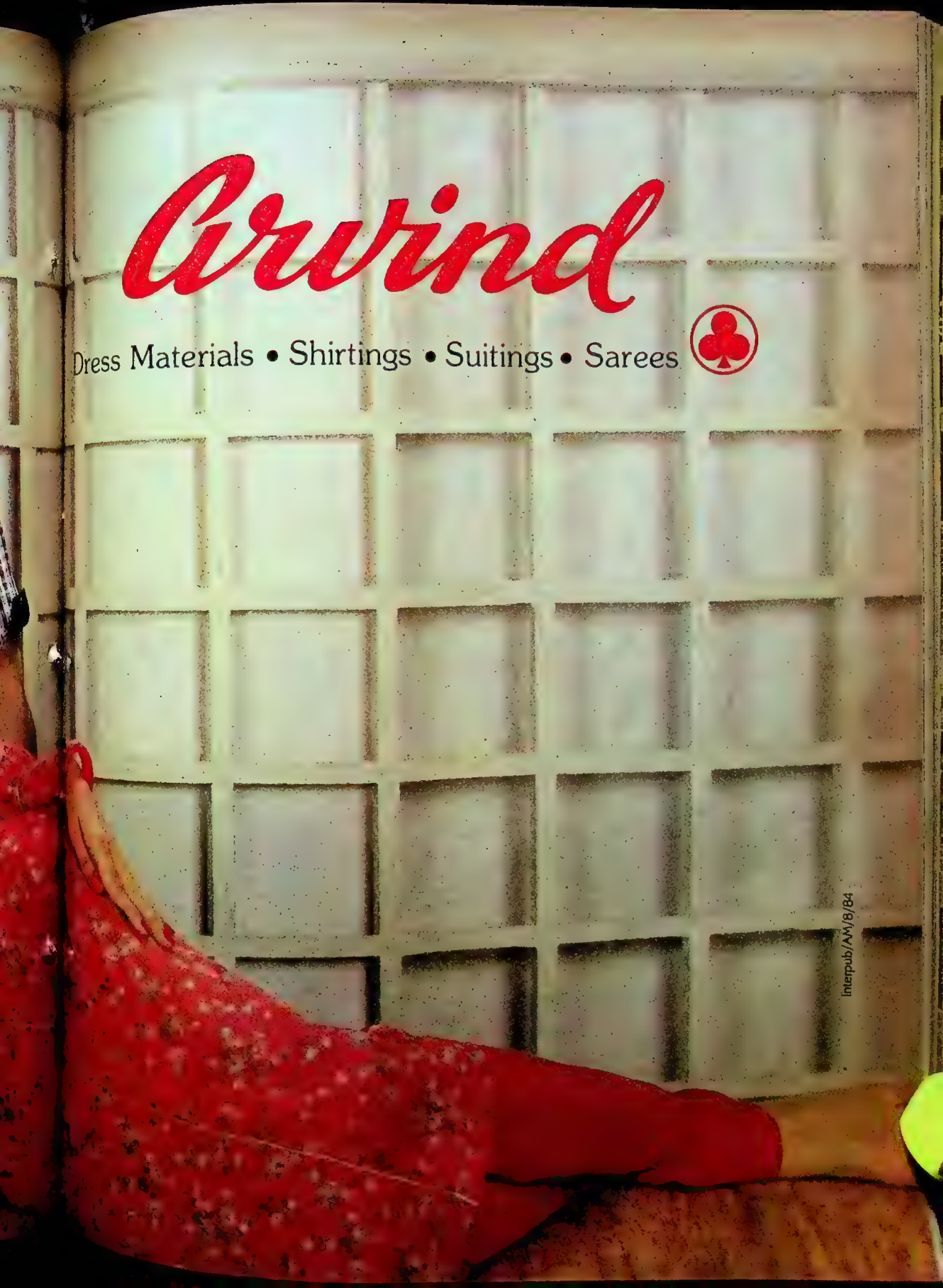
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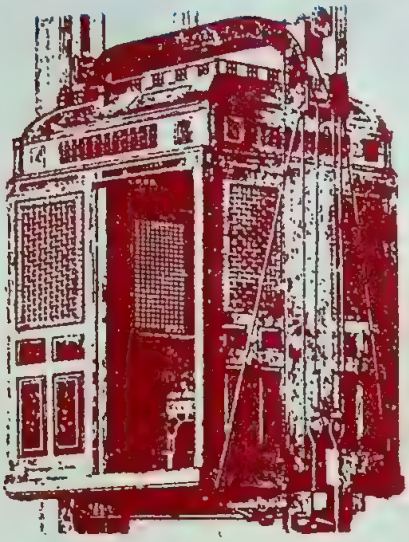
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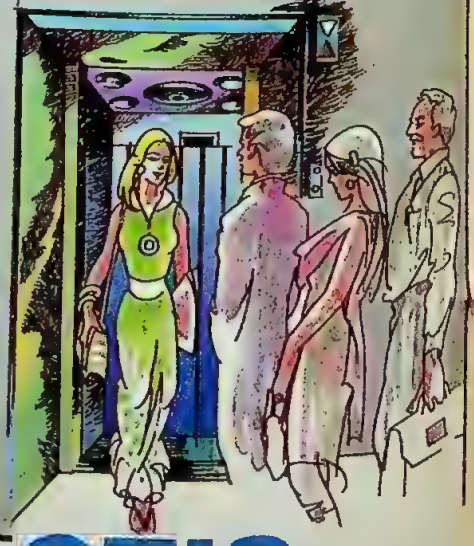
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Otis-India, evidently derives its strength from such high profile research and worldwide exposure. But the real grit lies in its capacity to put such technology into application through intensive in-house experimentation at its research tower, the only facility of its kind in India and the Far-East.

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Pratibha-OE-84-43

alternative system of communication to settle disputes: managers and supervisors at all levels were asked to hold daily sessions with employees to sort out their problems.

Production schedules were then monitored monthly, and a marketing strategy worked out. A new production plan was developed whereby all the targetted equipment could be manufactured in the first nine months of the year, and the remaining three months used for manufacturing any additional equipment as well as updating the assembly line. Meanwhile, the marketing structure was strengthened by opening six regional offices and 15 district offices. And officers were posted at every project site that needed earth-movers so that they could both monitor demand and provide after sales service to customers.

The results have been dramatic. The production of earth-moving equipment doubled from 661 in 1979 to 1,210 last year, and of railway coaches rose from 253 to 305. Apart from the sharp increases in turnover and profit, both the factories at Bangalore and Kolar have been working at over 100 per cent of their capacity, and the value of production per employee has trebled in four years to Rs 2.92 lakh. And despite the effort of introducing new, heavier earth-moving equipment in collaboration with Komatsu of Japan, the indigenous content of the equipment has been kept at 80 per cent.

Bhaskar has now set his eyes on a bigger apple: the international market. He says: "We had always been looking inwards, and lagged behind so much in technology, quality, prices and costs that we could not compete abroad." He plans to change all that through a major export effort. There has already been some achievement on this front: exports last year were a record Rs 14 crore, but all of this was to either Third World destinations or east Europe, and Bhaskar would now like to break into western markets. To meet the challenge, Bhaskar intends pouring Rs 15 crore into research and development over the next seven years. A new R&D complex has been set up, and the staff in this unit will be stepped up from 190 to 750.

The company may in the process be trying to bite more than it can chew, but Bhaskar remains confident: "We set high targets to be achieved, and our people lived up to it. Today we are welded together as a team that is producing results." Certainly, on the basis of the performance of the past four years, the confidence is justified. —RAJ CHENGAPPA

THE SARABHAIS

Trimming the Fat

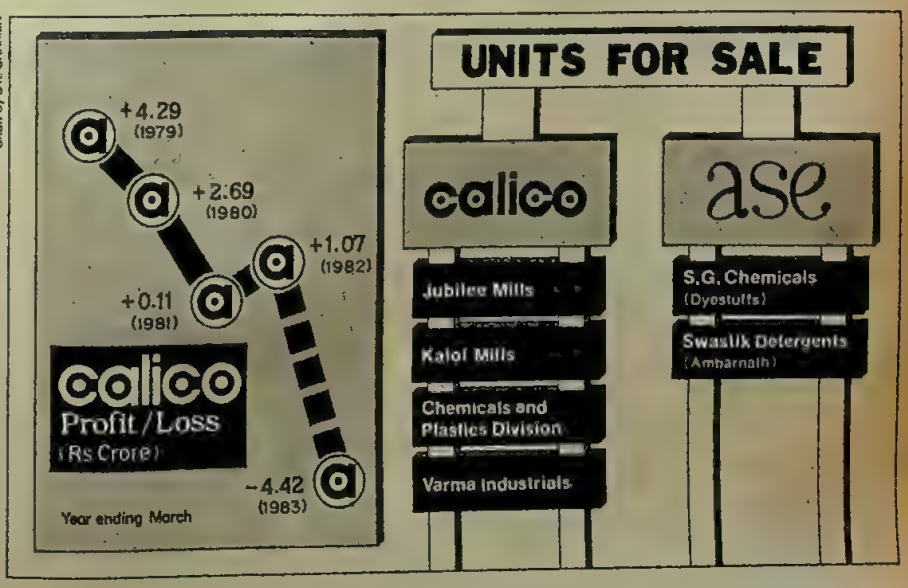
ARE THE Sarabhais getting ready to close shop? The rumour mills were working overtime in Bombay last fortnight suggesting precisely this. First, there was the news of the Rs 18.8 crore non-sale of Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises (ASE) dye chemicals division to Yogendra Mafatlal's Indian Dyestuffs Industries. This was quickly followed by reports that ASE's detergents business and large chunks of the 104-year-old Ahmedabad Manufacturing and Calico Printing Company (Calico) were also awaiting buyers. And almost inevitably, speculation began that the group's two major conglomerates—ASE and Calico—would both be sold lock, stock, and barrel. Included among the reported bidders were textile giant Dhirubhai Ambani, voracious corporate raider R.P. Goenka and numerous other industrial houses in the country.

Bombay's stock market responded characteristically to the speculation: ASE's sluggish Rs 10 shares shot up almost overnight by 18 per cent, from Rs 11 to Rs 13. But Gautam Sarabhai, chairman of both ASE and Calico, gave short shrift to the reports and denied that either of the two conglomerates, with combined assets of over Rs 400 crore, was up for sale. He argued that the Calico-ASE sale of business divisions was nothing more than a reorganisation of capital, and a shift from less profitable lines to modern technologies. Said Sarabhai last fortnight: "Those who hang onto things for sentimental reasons are not doing the best things for their company."

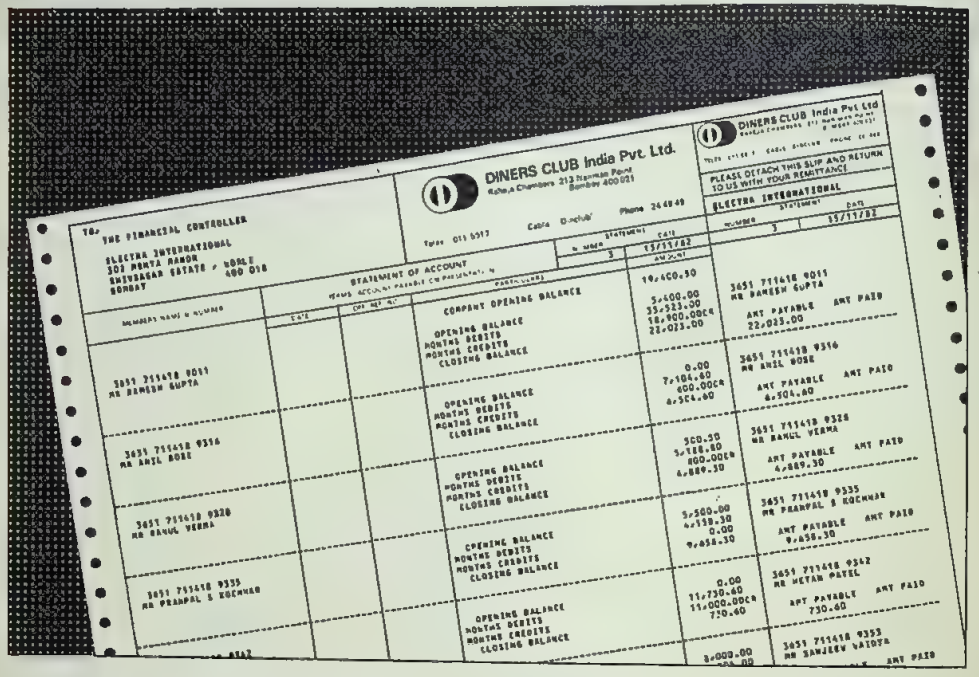
The need to dispense with sentiment has been increasingly felt in the Sarabhai empire of late. Both ASE and Calico have gone through a rough patch in the last three years, making the group tightly strapped for liquidity and excessively dependent on borrowed funds. The heavy chemical divisions and plastics have been hurt by the liberalised imports of the last few years, the giant pharmaceutical facilities—ASE is the country's largest private sector drugs manufacturer—was squeezed due to vitamin "C" price controls, and the three textile mills under Calico affected by a general recession in cloth sales.

Calico's net profit of Rs 4.3 crore in 1980 was by 1983 converted into a Rs 4.4 crore loss, and even this figure was understated since book sales of shares between wholly owned subsidiaries created fictitious profits of Rs 6.8 crore. ASE, a diversified conglomerate launched with much fanfare four years ago with the merger and public offer of various private Sarabhai chemical, engineering, pharmaceutical and computer companies, suffered too: despite high-technology areas of business, profits have been depressed and the Rs 10 scrip has for some time past languished at a price of Rs 11 to Rs 12.

When he ousted his nephews in September 1982 to take control of Calico (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1982) Gautam Sarabhai charged the previous manage-



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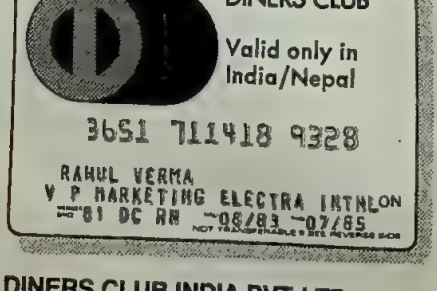
Ramesh Gupta went to Calcutta and Delhi. Anil Bose drew out Rs.3,000 for expenses. Rahul Verma took a client out to lunch. Ramesh Gupta went to Bangalore and Madras. . . .

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ment with "non-performance" and managerial inefficiency. But last fortnight's reports of drastic cuts in the Sarabhai group's manufacturing capabilities and its own reports to shareholders in 1983 are tacit admission that it was external circumstances rather than management failure which brought about the Calico down-slide.

The Sarabhais have sold units Fibre, switching from sugar to bulk drugs in the mid-sixties, and from an outdated detergents factory to newer facilities in 1974. The surgeon's scalpel is being applied once more only to replace loss making divisions in the two conglomerates with more "exciting" technologies. Included in the "dead-wood" which will be pruned are Calico's Jubilee and Kalol mill divisions, which account for half the company's installed textiles capacity, a huge chemicals and plastics complex at Bombay, a leather cloth plant in Bangalore, ASE's detergents facility at Ambarnath and the already sold dyestuffs division.

Both companies will emerge from the reorganisation considerably trimmer, but in all likelihood more profitable. Calico will use the funds it earns to double its profitable polyester staple fibre capacity at a cost of Rs 22 crore and set up a modern textile mill on a 30,000-spindle licence it already holds. ASE has already expanded its detergents capacity with a 30,000-tonne export plant at Kandla and 10,000-tonne plants in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana, and an "ultra-modern" fatty acids plant in the Ambarnath complex. Already a market leader in pharmaceuticals and mainframe computers, and the number two company in detergents, ASE will come out of the reorganisation more concentrated in those fields where it has an advantage.

Within the Sarabhai clan itself reactions to the news of large-scale disinvestments were ambivalent. Former Calico chairman Suhrid Sarabhai Jr, the son of Gautam's late elder brother, confessed that he was unable to comment since he was no longer involved in the company's management and did not know how the funds would be utilised. More candid, but nevertheless non-committal, the late Dr Vikram Sarabhai's son Kartikeya, also appointed as director in the 1982 management change, stated: "Obviously no one likes to see old industries being sold, but if this results in a switch to more dynamic and modern lines I would be very happy." But only time can tell if this will really happen. Till it does, the rumour mills will keep turning.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH



The Raymon factory premises in Calcutta

RAYMON ENGINEERING

Raising the Dead

THE *Guinness Book of World Records* may have to take note of events in recent weeks concerning Raymon Engineering in Calcutta, for a new record may be set by the reopening of an industrial unit that has remained closed for 16 years

The Raymon story goes back to 1964, when it was started by Monish Chandra Roy in the fond hope of building it up into a major manufacturer of railway wagons, boilers and trolleys. But a labour dispute, a lock-out and ensuing financial problems ended up in a series of complicated court cases, during one of which Roy collapsed in the courtroom and died. The company went into liquidation. And in the long years since then its 1,200 workers found work elsewhere, while weeds and elephant grass overgrew its 20-acre factory grounds and equipment rusted in sheds.

By April this year, however, there was activity again. Crowds collected at the factory gates, and large numbers of former employees witnessed in the court a strangely intense tussle for acquiring the dead company. Four months ago, the Calcutta High Court announced an auction for selling Raymon to the highest bidder. And in a curious sequence of events, Machine Works, owned by J.K. Saraff, and Hindustan Development Corporation (HDC) fought a duel for acquiring a company which even industrialist K.K. Birla had once eyed but then had given up as being worthless. In the first auction, Saraff bid Rs 1.51 crore, substantially higher than the reserve price of Rs 80 lakh fixed by the court. But the judge called for a second auction, where Saraff was once again the highest bidder, offering Rs 1.71 crore against HDC's Rs 1.70 crore. The court nevertheless called for yet another auction, and this time HDC finally walked away with a bid of Rs 1.95 crore, just Rs 1 lakh more than Saraff's final bid.

But workers clamouring at the factory gates with questions as to when the unit would start functioning again got no answer. For Raymon's manufacturing licence expired long ago, and HDC's representatives have been shuttling between Calcutta and Delhi to get a fresh licence for manufacturing wagons. HDC could make good on its investment even if the licence does not materialise: the equipment in the factory can be sold for scrap, and the 20 acres of land could fetch a neat pile. But then, Raymon will fail to find a place in the *Guinness Book*, and the workers will finally have to turn away for the last time.

—SUMANTA SEN

KELTRON

Troubled Times

THE TRIVANDRUM-based Kerala Electronics Development Corporation (Keltron) has for many years been a pace-setter in the industry. The first of numerous state-sector electronics corporations, and indeed the model for many that followed, Keltron's has been a high-profile success story in an otherwise industrially troubled state.

The surprise was therefore understandable last month when a report on public enterprises by the state Government's planning and economic affairs department highlighted the Rs 80.70 lakh loss suffered by the corporation in 1982-83 on a turnover of Rs 28 crore, and immediately cast doubts on the financial viability of many of the corporation's 18 industrial units. K.P.P. Nambiar, Keltron's high-flying chairman, quelled doubts about financial performance by pointing out that the organisation's preliminary accounts for 1983-84 showed a profit, but it was clear that a pace-setting company had suffered from a series of problems, many of them not of its making.





Nambiar (left) and women workers assembling radios: mounting problems

The Keltron controls instrumentation project incurred heavy losses because of lack of capital: a 1980 application for a Rs 5 crore loan to the Industrial Development Bank of India never came through and the company had to go with a begging bowl to a consortium of banks to get money. This proved too time-consuming, and the project was unable to fulfil a mammoth order worth Rs 51.31 crore.

Similarly, Keltron Power Devices Ltd lost money on the transistors it produced because an irrational import duty structure permitted cheaper imports of transistors. Keltron Dielectro Magnetics ran into problems of technology and finance, and delays in getting import clearances for machinery, in the process losing Rs 36.55 lakh. And yet another unit under the Keltron umbrella manufacturing colour TV relay lines for export to Europe had to virtually close down its production lines for a while when cheaper products from Japan and South Korea flooded the European market. In the process, a product agreement with Sprague of Belgium, involving an export obligation, proved abortive. Finally, Keltron Resistors also ran into losses, apparently because of problems with product quality.

The silver lining was provided by the good performance put in by four units under the Keltron umbrella: Keltron Projectors, Keltron Entertainments, Keltron Ferrites and Keltron Crystals, the last of these manufacturing quartz crystals for export to Hong Kong.

But Nambiar and Keltron are far from beaten. The controls instrumentation project finally got the money it needed late last year, the import duty on transistors and components has been changed in a manner that helps the company compete profitably against imports, and the production of colour TV relay lines has been restarted. Nambiar now projects a production turnover of Rs 56 crore in 1984-85, double the level two years ago, helped mainly by an anticipated boom in the Indian market for television sets.

Whatever doubts may have been raised about Keltron's financial performance and the success of its rapidly proliferating projects, and despite criticism that company has rushed headlong into a wide variety of projects without proper feasibility analysis, Nambiar plans to expand the corporation further and expects to do so profitably. And State Industry Minister E.Ahmed maintained last fortnight that "Keltron is the favourite whipping boy of certain vested interests, but the Kerala Government is very proud of its achievements in spite of its losses."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

THE MARKETS

Waiting Game

IT HAS been on the whole a quiet fortnight, the share price index moving just a few points, both up and down. It is as if the market were so preoccupied with itself it had no time for happenings elsewhere. An extra-large jumbo Seventh Plan with a projected investment of more than Rs 300,000 crore should have given the market a big push but it took the news in its stride without batting an eyelid. The index is now 10 points, or less than 4 per cent, short of the year's high and the market seems to be waiting for really good news before it jumps the barrier.

One piece of good news is the hike in the cement levy prices by about Rs 2 a bag, but this is more or less on the expected lines and may have been discounted by the market. Another piece of news, good or bad, depending upon how you look at it, is that nearly 30 companies will be entering the capital market in the next few months with issues totalling over Rs 400 crore, of which roughly a fifth comprise equity shares, and the rest cover convertible and non-convertible debentures. The biggest issue, rather complicated, but also quite attractive, is by Reliance Textiles which is offering conversion of the non-convertible portion of its debentures into equity shares and is also planning to issue more convertible debentures. The offer of conversion of the non-convertible portion into equity is rather a surprising departure that may be followed by other companies, provided—and this is an important provison—they can service the enlarged capital base on a sustained basis.

Among the companies with public issues in the pipeline are Larsen & Toubro, which is making a rights issue of equity shares at a premium of Rs 15 per share and is also issuing non-convertible debentures, the total issue on offer being

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base pockets and light double-seam stitching. It opens down the front with recessed pleats on either side.

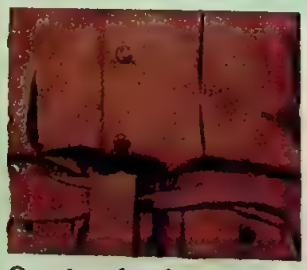




KITU GIDWANI

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The main attractions are the metal-rivet buttons down the jacket front and on the pocket flaps.



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The new long-sleeved bush shirt, has a softer, no-collar neckline. This, in pale green, can be worn under the jacket, or on it's own and has a subtle pattern in saddle stitching on the front, and on the cuffs, in self-coloured thread.



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Kitu Gidwani

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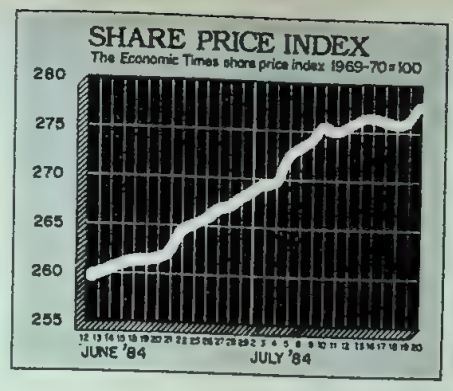
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	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 17.7.84	Change on fortnight
Ambalal Sarabhai	14.75	10.75	13.00	2.00 +
Apex	62.50	48.00	62.00	0.50 –
Ashok Leyland	37.50	28.00	29.50	1.50 +
Associated Cement	381.50	298.50	356.00	6.50 –
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.25	32.00	1.00 –
Ballarpur	53.30	44.50	46.10	1.60 +
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	261.50	4.50 –
BASF	49.00	38.50	46.00	2.50 +
Bga India	48.25	33.30	36.40	0.60 –
Birla Commerce	20.55	15.90	17.00	0.50 +
Birla Jute	62.50	52.85	53.30	2.10 –
Bow Plast	48.50	41.00	43.00	nil
Bst Star	34.00	29.50	31.00	1.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	63.50	64.50	1.00 –
Boots	67.00	45.00	63.00	1.00 –
Britannia Industries	40.60	33.60	36.30	0.10 +
Brooke Bond	44.30	34.10	44.30	2.90 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	822.50	18.75 –
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	47.50	0.50 –
Coates of India	30.87	26.50	28.00	nil
Colgate	116.00	100.00	116.00	1.00 +
Cyanamid	45.50	32.00	39.00	nil
DCM	78.12	47.37	53.75	0.75 +
Dunlop	28.20	25.00	26.20	1.20 +
Eas India Hotels	40.25	29.00	39.00	1.25 –
Elecon	53.00	31.00	51.00	1.00 –
Escorts	76.00	52.75	54.50	0.40 +
Food Specialities	92.00	69.00	90.50	1.50 –
Gas Carbon	25.00	15.00	16.00	1.00 +
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	20.30	21.00	0.70 +
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	49.25	1.25 –
Hindlilia Chemicals	25.00	20.50	23.50	0.50 +
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	44.00	47.90	0.40 –
Hindustan Cocoa	55.00	31.00	54.50	6.00 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	52.25	2.50 +
Hindustan Motors	45.36	40.40	45.18	0.68 +
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.00	23.15	0.85 +
Indian Cable	24.10	20.40	22.75	0.25 +
Indian Explosives	28.00	25.00	26.00	0.30 –
Indian Organic	37.50	31.00	36.75	2.75 +
Indian Oxygen	38.25	33.00	35.20	0.55 –
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	62.00	4.25 +
I.T. Synthetics	47.50	39.00	43.30	3.80 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	47.50	2.50 +
Kesoram Cotton	61.60	47.50	48.60	1.09 –
Kirloskar Engineering	166.00	113.00	153.00	13.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	550.00	407.50	520.00	30.00 –
Kothari (Madras)	27.00	22.00	27.00	0.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	65.00	75.50	1.00 –
Lipton	37.75	24.50	36.60	1.15 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	72.00	52.00	71.50	0.50 –
Meghalam Cement	31.00	20.00	26.25	5.50 +
Mcll Rubber	30.31	24.50	29.37	0.13 –
Motor Industries	277.50	212.50	252.50	25.00 –
National Organic	208.25	176.50	180.00	20.00 –
Nicon	37.00	32.00	37.00	0.50 +
Otis Elevator	73.00	54.00	73.00	7.00 +
Premier Automobile	314.00	246.00	314.00	23.00 +
Raleigh	55.00	41.00	43.00	1.00 +
Reliance	123.00	110.00	117.00	0.50 –
Shriram Fibres	35.25	30.47	35.25	2.06 +
Siemens	47.50	42.00	42.00	nil
SPL	38.75	28.06	38.75	2.94 +
Sriram Products	67.00	43.50	46.50	1.00 +
Tata Chemicals	67.00	53.25	67.00	0.50 +
Tata Steel	326.50	245.50	324.00	2.50 –
Tata	428.00	398.00	409.00	7.00 +
Tata Tobacco	86.50	50.85	86.50	4.70 +
Union Carbide	29.25	24.80	28.90	0.35 –
Usha Martin Black	22.50	19.50	22.25	2.25 +
Usha	395.00	335.00	377.00	31.00 +
Voltas	43.50	28.50	37.00	3.75 +
Wallfort	48.00	31.50	31.50	2.50 –
Wallfort Century Leasing	14.35	12.60	12.60	nil
Wallfort Trust				



of the order of Rs 30 crore or thereabouts. Hoechst has already come out with its issue and Burroughs Wellcome is expected to follow suit. Raymond Woollen has announced a rights issue of both equity and non-convertible debentures, and is said to be toying with the idea of a convertible debenture issue at a later date. Ranbaxy Laboratories have promoted a new company, Max India, which is setting up a Rs 5 crore chemicals plant in Punjab in collaboration with a Japanese company. The public issue of the new company is for a small amount, Rs 85 lakh, which makes it that much more attractive. Ranbaxy itself has offered rights non-convertible debentures. Other similar offers about to hit the market are expected to be from Indian Hotels, Ambalal Sarabhai, Tata Tea and Hico Products. All seem to have expansion programmes in hand calling for large dollops of cash.

How does all this affect the share market? There can be two views about this. In as much as all this extra capital has to be serviced through higher profits, the equity shareholders may have to make do with smaller dividends in the initial stages while the expansion programmes are under way. But this is not how the companies manage their affairs. Most good companies—and nearly all the companies listed above are blue chip companies with varying shades of blue—take good care to ensure that the interests of equity shareholders are not affected, since they are the bedrock of their fortunes. The very fact that these companies are going in for expansion in a big way, is good news for the equity-wallas. This may also be one reason why the share market is in the midst of a small boom, though restricted to a selected number of companies. If the past is any guide, the boom is likely to spread to other scrips also. This is always something of a gamble, but where would the share market be without its gamblers?

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES
July 17, 1984

	LATEST	Change on month
ET Commodity Price Index*	306.3	5.6 +
Chemicals	350.5	7.3 +
Industrial Fibres	231.3	11.4 +
Metals	402.6	7.7 +
Gold, standard Rs per 10 gm	1950.00	30.00 +
Silver, .999 Rs per kg	3475.00	45.00 +

SHARES
July 17, 1984

ET Share Price Index*	276.5	14.7 +
Cement	224.4	35.4 +
Chemicals	237.2	8.8 +
Engineering	467.8	19.0 +
Fertilisers	267.4	9.4 +
Paper	550.9	0.7 +
Rubber Goods	183.3	1.1 –

MONEY
June 29, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.5%	nil
Call Money Rate, Bombay	–	–
Money Supply	2%	
Bank Deposits	1.2%	
Foreign Exchange Assets	4.2 % –	

*Index—1969–70 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.5046	9.3902
Austria	As SCH	100	57.3619	56.7199
Bahrain	Dinar	1	30.2084	29.9976
Bangladesh	Taka	100	45.6586	45.3401
Canada	Dollar	1	8.6418	8.5475
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1004	1.0883
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5122	9.4398
France	Franc	1	1.3100	1.2953
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.4664	1.4506
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1201	1.1123
Iran	Rial	100	12.4098	12.3227
Italy	Lira	100	0.6503	0.6443
Japan	Yen	100	4.6902	4.6373
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7818	0.7764
Kuwait	Dinar	1	38.1946	37.9282
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.6892	4.6369
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8250	0.8192
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7086	0.7037
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5612	3.5232
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8238	0.8181
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.3452	5.7864
Spain	Peseta	100	7.0527	6.9913
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4545	0.4513
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3822	1.3666
Switzerland	France	1	4.7493	4.6980
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6609	0.6563
Thailand	Baht	100	44.8812	44.6628
UK	Pound	1	15.1830	15.0478
USA	Dollar	1	11.5150	11.3825
UAE	Dihram	1	3.1057	3.0840
USSR	Rouble	1	13.6496	13.5544
W Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0168	3.9745

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 23 July 1984.

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Rs.50,000/-	Rs.150/-	Rs.1,00,000/-	Rs.300/-

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Uncivil Rights

A DECISION of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on July 9 may have set a dangerous precedent in the fight against assaults on civil liberties. To the dismay of civil rights activists and many lawyers, a bench of Acting Chief Justice R. Chennakesava Reddy and Justice P. Kondaramayya suspended an earlier order of Justice K. Ramaswamy of the same court seeking an explanation from the police chief of Karimnagar about the death in police custody of one Sakala Chinna Venkati, and the court-ordered civil liberties inquiry into the incident.

Ramaswamy's order came when the



K.G. Kannabiran



Justice Reddy

The case has already evoked considerable interest because if the revised judgement stands, it will shelter police officials who may not wish to cooperate with civil liberties organisations

court received a letter from a Nagarjuna University law lecturer, A. Subramanyam, citing a newspaper report of a police raid and atrocities in Kondapur village in Metapally during which Venkati, his brother and some others were taken into custody. Two days later, the report said, Venkati's body was handed over to relatives for last rites. Ramaswamy treated the letter as a petition, passed his orders and appointed civil liberties lawyer K.G. Kannabiran to visit the village and assist in gathering facts on the case.

Ironically enough, the same court had only a few weeks earlier appointed an inquiry into the plight of bonded labour in Guntur. The judgement revising Ramaswamy's order has heightened the confrontation between the police and civil liberties groups. As it is, the Karimnagar police had tried desperately to stall the fact-finding mission, and it was on an appeal from the superintendent of police that Ramaswamy's order was reversed.

The People's Union for Civil Liberties has gone on appeal to the Supreme Court, but the case has already evoked considerable interest because if the revised judgement stands, it will shelter police officials who may not wish to cooperate with civil liberties organisations or even provide courts with information on alleged atrocities.

The Karimnagar police objected to the inquiry arguing that there was no need for the court to have issued special instructions since the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) provided for machinery to deal with such cases. They also argued that Kannabiran was a functionary of two civil liberties organisations and was active in defending 'extremists', implying that his inquiry would not be unbiased. The police said that Venkati was wanted in a case of rifle snatching, that two hours after he was apprehended on June 18 he complained of pain in his chest and died 10 minutes after he was admitted into a government hospital. The police argued that Venkati's wife and family had made no complaints about his death.

Kannabiran in his submission, countered the police arguments, saying that it is in fact police terror that prevents people from taking recourse to the machinery provided by the CrPC. He also defended the role of civil liberties organisations, arguing that they helped protect the rights of citizens. Finally, he defended his own position, saying that if defending extremists implied that the lawyer was himself an extremist, then by the same logic those who defended tax evaders would have to be considered tax evaders.

However, the Andhra Pradesh police with a long track record of clipping civil rights, scuttling inquiries and terrorising radicals view social action groups as adversaries rather than partners in ensuring basic human rights.

Kannabiran has been a consistent campaigner for civil rights. He was involved in the striking down of the Andhra Pradesh Preventive Detention Act of 1969, exposing the so-called encounters where young radicals were shot by the police during the Emergency before the Bhargava Commission, unravelling the episode that triggered off what is now known as the Rameeza Bee riots in Hyderabad before the Muktadar Com-

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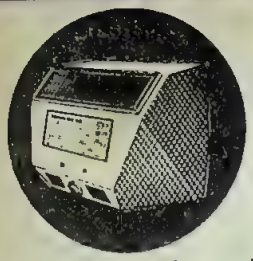
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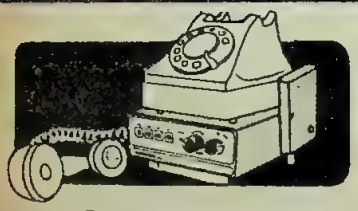


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Akshara

mission and in securing remissions for several hundred prisoners during the silver jubilee of the state's formation.

Venkati may have been an extremist, but whatever be the final outcome of the Kondapur case, the police can do little to clear itself of the suspicions of deaths of people in its custody. Of the 11 cases this year, Venkati, the police say, was an alleged extremist, another allegedly a prostitute, two others allegedly thieves. Civil libertarians have asked questions which the police find embarrassing and refuse to answer. In the current context, that itself is a formidable gain for the cause of human rights.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

KERALA

Cigarette Case

IN February last year, a high-profile advertisement campaign for Wills Gold Flake cigarettes swamped Kerala newspapers. On the surface, the ad seemed innocuous enough. It showed a man dressed in an advocate's black coat and white collar holding a burning cigarette. Superimposed on the legend was a packet of Wills Gold Flake. The legend read: "I always prefer plain cigarettes. And I smoke only Wills Gold Flake. It's the best plain cigarette available." To add a touch of authenticity, the background showed an advocate's office with law books stacked on the shelves. But the authenticity went beyond that. The advocate was for real. Namely, Krishna Pillai, a practising lawyer in the Kerala High Court and the advertisement carried a signed statement by Pillai testifying to the fact.

The Kerala Bar Council was, however, hardly amused and in what is a historic case, suspended Pillai last fortnight for violation of the Bar Council of India rules. The rule (No. 36) states that an advocate shall not solicit work through advertising either indirectly or directly. The reason for the late reaction on the part of the Bar Council was that not only was the case a unique one, Pillai himself initially claimed that the photograph and the caption in the advertisement were used without his consent. He also stated that he had filed a Rs 1 lakh suit in the lower courts against ITC, the manufacturers of the cigarettes.

But the Bar Council figured where there was smoke there is bound to be fire and launched an investigation into the affair. The mounting evidence clearly proved that Pillai had willingly lent his name and profession to the campaign. Clarion Advertising, the advertising agency involved, produced their photographer who displayed 30-odd pictures of Pillai in various poses. Clarion's local representative also deposed that Pillai had consented to his name and photograph being used.



Advertisement featuring Pillai

Pillai, however, is sticking stubbornly to his guns. Two days after suspending him, the Bar Council stayed the order to enable Pillai to file an appeal before the disciplinary committee of the council. If he loses his case, he can then appeal to the Supreme Court. "I shall go all the way to the Supreme Court for justice," he insists. But his past record can conceivably stop him from getting there. Pillai, 59, a retired sub-judge, has had a chequered career. His tenure as a sub-judge was terminated by the high court on disciplinary grounds and the Bar Council says that there have been a number of complaints filed against him earlier.

Meanwhile, rather than boosting his practice, the advertisement has had the opposite effect. Complained Pillai: "My work has been reduced after the advertisement and some of my clients have withdrawn their files from me fearing action against me by the Bar Council. That, at the moment, is the least of my problems. Now that the case has become a cause celebre, for Pillai at least, smoking would definitely appear to be injurious to professional health.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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...ya is for the classes."

Jostling Jaya for a crack at the top ...ot is a surprise contender for the crown, ...mple Kapadia, whose stormy marriage ...screen idol Rajesh Khanna has made ...re of a splash than her first, and till ...w the only, film appearance in the ...ck-buster *Bobby* ten years ago. But her ...rid private life succeeded in keeping ...r in the public eye and today she is ...fidently poised for a come-back with ...promising films as *Manzil Manzil*, ..., *Zakhmee Sher* and *Saagar* all ...ching release. She also commands a ...rket rate that is well above more ...blished female stars and admits ...er immodestly that her only rival at ...top is Sridevi. "I am more beautiful ...day than when I did *Bobby* and had yet ...shed my puppy fat. Looks are my ...ts," she boasts.

But she will first have to contend ...h Meenakshi Sheshadri, the 19-year-...former Miss India, whose aloofness ...frigid air has earned her the sobriquet ...the Ice Maiden. Even on the sets, ...nakshi buries her well-formed nose ...a book between takes and her life-...would do credit to Snow White. Says ...: "If the press finds me uninteresting ..., I can't help it. I don't believe in ...dals or gossip. And I have no steady ...-friend." But she is a professional ...n to her well-manicured fingertips. ...ned in Bharat Natyam "ever since I ...ld walk", she still takes dancing les-...s to improve her screen presence. Her ... film, *Painter Babu*, bombed badly ... she came back with a bang in *Hero* ...posite Jackie Shroff and her career ...ph has taken a sharp upturn.

...gnificantly, however, the battle at ... the top is also a reflection of a ... marked change in audience tastes, ...nger for new faces and new symbols ...place the jaded '70s. In stark contrast ...e free-wheeling life-styles of earlier ...ng ladies, the new challengers, with ...ception of Dimple, are paragons of ...e, untainted by the kind of messy ...dals that gave the gutter press a ...n for existence. Sridevi may sizzle ...a crisp masala dosa on screen, but off ... she is a model of chaste decorum. ... rarely speaks in public or to the ...ess without first consulting her parents. ...ark contrast to her bump-and-grind ...umes, or lack of them, on the screen, ... is decorously draped in sober saris off ...e sets. Says film distributor Ramesh ...ippy: "It's amazing how she can switch ...and switch off." In a recent interview, ...ridevi confessed candidly that despite all the daring and baring she does on screen, her most prized possession was her virginity. Jaya Prada and Meenakshi sport the same philosophy but the phenomenal success of Sridevi indicates that as far as the Hindi films audience is concerned, sex still reigns supreme. Explains director Ramesh Sippy: "It is wrong to assume that the audience wants the girl next door or the one he can take home to mother. It is the girl he imagines himself with in bed. The girl who makes him feel good." Adds Dimple: "He is looking for fantasy,someone gorgeous, someone who can deliver the goods. Lots of oomph. Acting is secondary."

(Below) Rekha, Hema Malini, and Zeenat Aman: overtaken







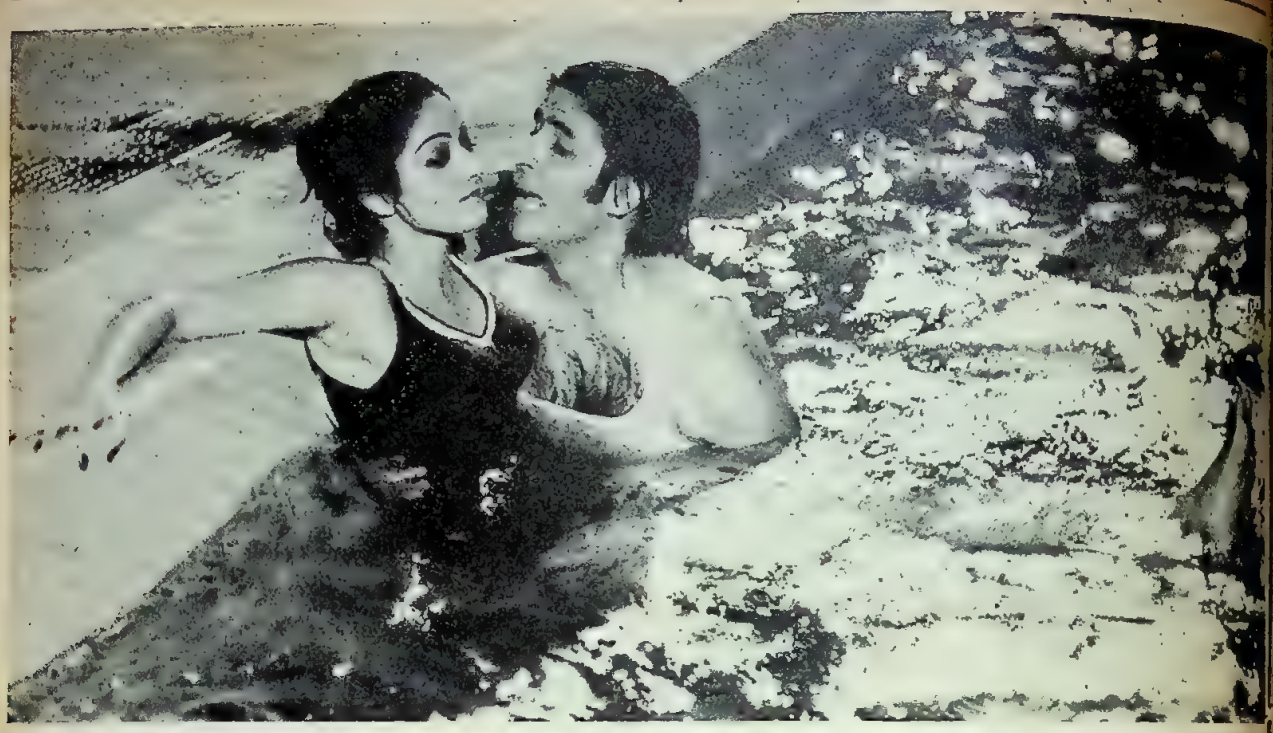
But judging by Sridevi's success, that may be just wishful thinking. Few filmgoers remember that Sridevi made her debut as a demure village belle in *Solwa Saawan* in 1978. The movie sunk like the proverbial stone. But somehow it only made the star of well over a 100 Tamil and Telugu films more determined to claw her way to the top. She lost weight, had plastic surgery done to her outsized nose, took Hindi lessons and then displayed the qualities that have catapulted her to stardom; a delightful lack of inhibition in her steamy dance numbers and the ability to make it resemble good, clean fun.

Little wonder then, that she is being constantly compared to former screen siren Mumtaz. Like Mumtaz, Sridevi has the talent to wear the most innocent expression when involved in the sexiest of scenes. In *Tohfa*, she balanced atop a prostrate Jeetendra and looked girlishly virginal doing so. In *Inquilaab* she pulled off Amitabh Bachchan's trousers and yet made it look like a playful prank. Says she: "We (south Indian actresses) are less sophisticated than the Bombay girls, more earthy. I crave love and popularity and I get love and popularity. It is films like *Himmatwala* that my fans love and so it is those kinds of films that I accept."

In fact, before *Himmatwala*, Sridevi hardly managed Rs 4 lakh per film. But the hits that followed—*Justice Chowdhary*, *Mawaali*, *Tohfa* and *Maqsad* pitchforked her into the exclusive top bracket making her the first female star to consistently earn more than Rs 10 lakh per film. Distributors admit that a Sridevi-starrer has the drawing power to gross over a crore of rupees, and till now she has acted in over a dozen Hindi films.

Sridevi's biggest asset is that apart from her raw sexuality she can also act. Down south, she was better known for her acting abilities, a fact that was revealed to some extent in *Sadma*. But Bombay producers prefer her sex appeal to her acting ability and she is in grave danger of being typecast. Luckily, her youthful looks (film circles put her age down as 26 or 27, though she looks much younger) and the naughty gleam in her eyes make her eligible to star opposite the older heroes as well as the new crop of star sons.

In her work, Sridevi is a producer's delight. She is disciplined, arrives on time for work and never messes up shooting dates. Her spare time is spent perfecting her Hindi and taking dance lessons. Marvels actor Rakesh Roshan



who starred opposite her in his own venture, *Jaag Utha Insaan*: "She takes her work very seriously down to the smallest detail. During the movie she worked till 10 p.m. on a song and dance picturisation then rushed to Gopi Krishna for a dance lesson and was back on the sets for rehearsals at 7 a.m. I wish other heroines of her stature would put in so much hard work." Not everybody, however, is impressed. Miaows columnist Devyani Chaubal: "South Indian girls are generally not interested in lovers but in buyers, a producer who comes with green notes wrapped in a hand towel is more important than everything."

But for people like Sridevi and Jaya Prada, their current success is also a matter of timing. They arrived on the Bombay scene at just the right moment when there was a void at the top. Rekha was going through a temperamental phase and had become unpredictable and unapproachable. Hema Malini, after producing a baby, had started looking too mature and matronly for most of the male stars. Shabana Azmi and Smita Patil were looking to establish themselves in art cinema.

With the field wide open, Sridevi arrived with *Himmatwala* and the rest is cinematic history. For Jaya, the transition has been less smooth. She had a series of flops in 1980 (*Lok Parlok* and *Takkar*) and she was forced to beat a hasty retreat southwards before returning in triumph with *Kaamchor* in 1982. But



SHOW TIME

Sridevi (above) with Bachchan in *Inquilaab*, and Jaya Prada in *Bhemaa*

now both the southern stars have a bost of top films lined up with the major mal stars including several with Amitabh

Dimple, on the other leg, could giv them a run for their money if she mak serious attempt. Dimple's biggest enem is her unprofessional approach to work specially when compared with her rivals from the south. Even before any of her new films have been released, she has already managed to upset almost all her producers by refusing to give them any dates for shooting stints. Sniffs Devyani Chaubal: "Dimple has wine, lovers and millions. She is totally media-made. She is taking the entire industry for a ride and is enjoying it."

But then, it can well afford to co sidering the relative calm at the top as far as Sridevi and Jaya Prada are concerned and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Meenakshi Sheshadri. But that may be deceptive. It's a bitchy w behind the billboards and there are a number of young aggressive actresses like Amrita Singh, Anooradha Patel, Moo Moon Sen and Radha all scrambling for space on the ladder. All it needs is just two flops for Sridevi and Jaya and then the number one position will be up for grabs. And those who don't have what it takes could get trampled in the rush.

—COOMI KAPOOR in Bombay and K.N.RAGHAVENDRA RAO in Ma


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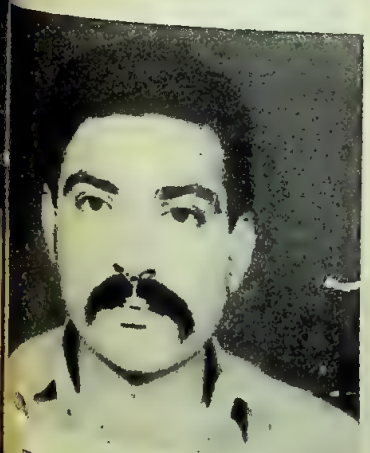
AFGHANISTAN

Message From Kabul



THE EXECUTION OF Mohammed Salam-ullah, alias Alamgir, the Al Zulfikar terrorist responsible for the 1981 hijack of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Boeing 707, in Kabul early in July has touched off a new wave of mutual recrimination between the Damascus-based organisation and the pro-Soviet regime of President Babrak Karmal. Radio Kabul announced the execution of Alamgir on July 10 after his trial by the Afghan revolutionary court for the murder of Parvez Sinwari, a Pakistani emigre, last year and also for the killing of a Pakistani citizen at the time of the 1981 hijack.

Al Zulfikar, the terrorist group headed by Murtaza and Shahnawaz, the two sons of the slain Pakistani president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, sees in the execution of Alamgir, the 24-year-old 'commander' of the group's Karachi division and a Pakistan Military Academy drop-out unmistakable signs of the Karmal regime discarding old friends for the sake of expediency. In 1979, months after the hanging of Bhutto, Al Zulfikar was organised on the soil of Afghanistan with active patronage from the Afghan authorities, and both Murtaza and Shahnawaz were sheltered in Kabul.



The executed hijacker Alamgir

Alamgir, accompanied by Naser Jamal and Arshad Butt, all Karachi boys belonging to Al Zulfikar, hijacked the PIA Boeing on March 2, 1981 from Karachi to Kabul in what has gone down as the longest air piracy in history—nine days—following which the Pakistani authorities had to accede to the hijackers' demand of releasing 52 political prisoners, many of whom were awaiting capital punishment.

Significantly, the hijacking was not condemned by the Afghan authorities at that time even though the prisoners were released by the Pakistani authorities at their own insistence at Damascus and not in Kabul. However, relations between Al Zulfikar and the Kabul Government were getting increasingly sour since 1981 when the Afghans, nettled by Al Zulfiqar's internal squabbles on Afghan soil, began interfering with them in a big way. Finally, Murtaza and Shahnawaz left their haven in Afghanistan and headed for Libya. The two now operate from Tripoli, the Libyan capital, and Damascus, the capital of Syria, and command a well-trained militia of about 1,500 men. Even Alamgir did not enter Afghanistan for a long time since the hijacking.

He re-entered Afghanistan, according to the Radio Kabul announcement, on March 14 last year, apparently under orders from the Al Zulfikar leadership to liquidate Sinwari, a former Al Zulfikar activist who had adopted Afghan nationality and was suspected of being an Afghan plant in the organisation. Diplomatic sources in New Delhi said Alamgir was sent from Libya and he might have travelled with false documents. He shot Sinwari dead on March 16 in front of a theatre in Kabul and was arrested by the security police in dramatic circumstances at Kabul Airport the same night, minutes before he was to fly out.

Informed diplomats in Kabul and New Delhi interpret the Afghan action as a determined move by the Afghan Government to strike an anti-terrorist posture and to restore normalcy in its relations with the outside world. The fallout of the 1981 hijack had been costly for the Afghans. Group of Seven, the powerful member countries of the International Civil Aviation Organisation including the US, Canada, West Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Japan, decided to boycott Afghanistan, thus denying Ariana, the Afghan national carrier landing rights all along the lucrative route of Frankfurt, Paris and London.

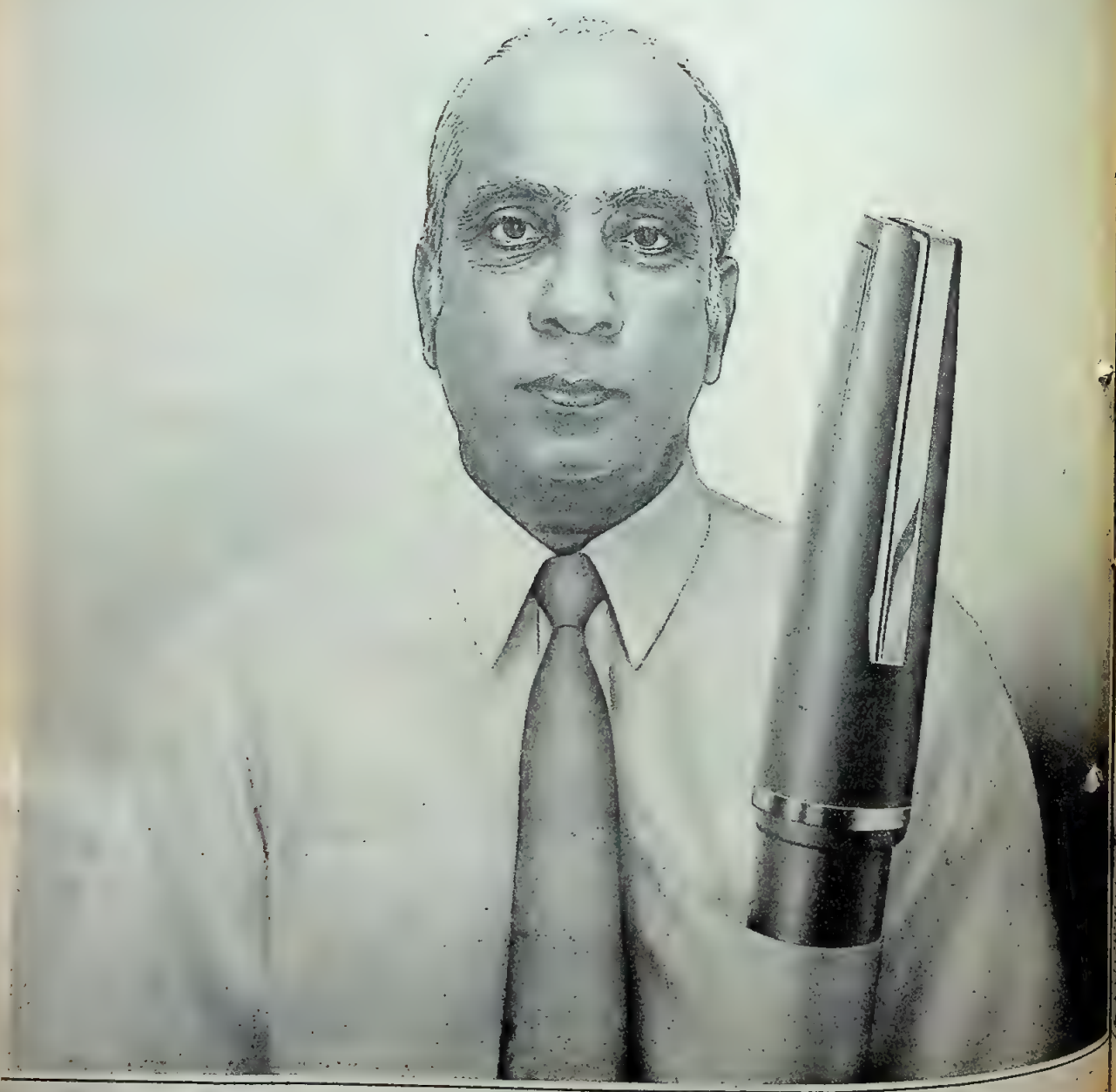


Shahnawaz and Murtaza Bhutto

The state-controlled Pakistani media prominently displayed the news of Alamgir's execution, thus hinting that Pakistan appreciated the posture of toughness adopted by the Afghans against the assorted followers of the Bhutto family. The Kabul Government also wants direct talks to immediately commence with Pakistan, a desire which can come true only if the latter recognises the Karmal regime. In dealing strictly with Al Zulfikar, President Karmal has neutralised a major irritant in the way. But, along the Baluchistan front, there are still 5,000 Baluch guerillas garrisoned at the Afghan town of Kandahar, which Pakistan sees as the main stumbling block to normalisation of relations.

—SUMIT MITRA

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ASSAM

Back on the Boil

AFTER simmering on the back burner for some time, the five-year-long agitation in Assam is once again back on the boil. The streets of Gauhati are again lined with angry writings on the walls, and strikes have staged a come-back. Last fortnight, defeating elaborate government efforts to maintain normalcy, a 12-hour bandh of Kamrup district, which includes Gauhati, called by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to protest the death of a student in police custody, drew a near-total response, crippling work at government offices, closing down the city's transport service and emptying schools, colleges and universities.

Soon afterwards, the residents of New Delhi also got a taste of the Assamese wrath when about 15 AASU workers, led by AASU President Prafulla Mahanta, were picked up by the police when they picketed the road in front of Boat Club. "The Congress(I) seems determined not to allow a peaceful solution to the Assam problem," said Mahanta.

The provocation was provided by the Congress (I) Government of Hiteswar Saikia which, from the first week of June, began circulating a series of instructions to its deputy commissioners in the districts ordering them to "update" the controversial 1979 electoral rolls for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The move caught the leaders of the movement, some of whom have been talking to the Centre about a total redefinition of citizenship and consequently of electoral rolls in Assam, totally unawares.

The Government circular, leaked out in the local press, was greeted with a series of shootings and time bomb explosions. In the six weeks till the middle of July, six persons were killed and 55 injured, six of them seriously. And, while there was an abrupt spurt in terrorist activities in Darrang and Sonitpur districts on the northern bank of the swirling Brahmaputra, the familiar politics of bandhs and peaceful agitation was back in Gauhati, the nerve-centre of the state.

The All Assam Students' Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) followed up their calls for an Assam bandh on June 15 and a road blockade programme on June 25 with fresh calls for the offering of satyagraha at the district headquarters—discreetly in batches of four to avoid arrest under Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code which is in force in most of the state. Youngsters came out on the streets for three consecutive days for half-an-hour each evening to raise a din condemning the state Government.

To the embarrassment of the frail but strong-willed Saikia, the paranoid feeling of the Assamese-speaking people which had preceded the blood-spattered 1983 February assembly poll showed signs of inevitable return. After more than a year of quietness, the sprawling campus of Gauhati University was echoing again with agitated voices. The university examinations were postponed and the police raided the hostels twice last month, recovering choppers, swords, gelatin sticks and 9 mm bullets. Last fortnight, Saikia and his Education Minister, Mukut Sharma, hiding their worries behind a brave front, quietly ordered the drafting of an ordinance for a take-over of the university so that the hostels—described by Saikia as "the Golden Temple of the miscreants"—could be closed down for the rest of the academic year.

While the agitation began to take shape anew, the extremist fringe promptly moved into action. The first result was an explosion that ripped through the shed of a bazaar on a market-day in Mongoldoi, the headquarters of Darrang district. The bomb, which was fitted with a timer made out of a cheap wrist-watch, went off when hundreds of villagers had assembled. Wrapped haphazardly without a casing, it was stuffed with rusted nails which served as shrapnel. Of the five



AASU workers on protest picket in Delhi on June 23: back to the streets

people killed in the explosion, two were Assamese-speaking, thus heightening the irony of the act of desperation.

Three days later, a group of people shot the President of the Sonitpur district Congress (I), Srikanta Sarma, at neighbouring Tezpur. Neither the AASU nor the AAGSP condemned either of the incidents. On the contrary, they stepped up their campaign against the Saikia Government and the Centre. Prafulla Mahanta, president of AASU, was only milder than others when he said that elections on the basis of the existing rolls would be "opposed" by the agitationists. But Atul Bora, the bearded AAGSP convener told INDIA TODAY: "This time if Assam is made to suffer the humiliation of going to polls with the 1979 electoral rolls, it will be resisted throughout the state, and it is hypocritical to talk of the form of resistance remaining non-violent."

The AASU leaders feel particularly let down because of the expectations of a settlement that were raised by the Centre agreeing to continue dialogues with them. However, the talks were deadlocked last month as Union Cabinet Secretary Krishnaswamy Raosaheb, according to the AASU's version, turned "unresponsive" to its offers. The offers were:

- all foreign nationals who have moved into Assam since 1951 must be detected;
- all post-1971 immigrants must be deported from India;
- all post-1961 immigrants are to be disenfranchised for a period of time, the length of which is negotiable, but they must be taken away and distributed over the rest of the country; and, "this condition being fully and properly met";
- Assam will keep the foreigners who had crossed over between 1951 and 1961.

AASU leaders insist that the Centre had "well-nigh conceded" 1971 as the cut-off year for deportation and was only bargaining over the disenfranchisement clause—debating whether it should be for five years or 10 years, and reiterating that only post-1965 immigrants should be temporarily denied voting rights. But the AASU was caught unawares by the decision to go ahead with the polls on the basis of the 1979 electoral list. "It is a stab in the back," says Bhrigu Phukan, the AASU general secretary, who, like Mahanta, also remains unchanged in five years.

THE INCITEMENT for the latest spate of violence was undoubtedly provided by the Centre which, on one hand, had assigned Raosaheb to carry on talks with the AASU for finding a way out of the vexed "foreign nationals problem" and, on the other, refused them even a face-saving concession. And while the talks went round in circles, Saikia began announcing that the Lok Sabha elections would take place at any rate. This was interpreted by many as an act of betrayal because the talks had created the impression that the Centre might after all desist from ramming another election down the throats of the Assamese people without sorting out the problems of immigrants' citizenship and domicile.

In New Delhi, R.K. Trivedi, the chief election commissioner, pleaded helplessness to carry out an intensive revision of rolls in Assam because the Assam Government was still awaiting completion of work by the tribunals appointed by it under Illegal Migrants Act. However, an exactly similar argument had been put forward in 1983.

Saikia maintains that the movement has "spent out itself", and shows the figures of attendance at the state secretariat on the bandh day as proof of his confidence. But senior ministers recall that on the day of the bandh, buses in Gauhati plied without passengers and very few employees attended government offices other than the state secretariat. And most cabinet members and MLA's grudgingly admit that after winning an election which the majority of the people did not want, they have only been successful in harvesting general wrath and unpopularity. "Kick out Saikia's illegitimate government": reads a huge graffiti at the Gauhati University complex.

The ostracism of the state's ministers and MLA's makes a pathetic sight. They are visited only by supplicants and official callers-on. At Dibrugarh, when Keshab Chandra Gogoi, chief minister for a spell of two months before the imposition of

President's Rule in 1982 and the revenue and industry minister at present, held his father's *shradh* recently, the townpeople who had been invited to the function stayed away. At Dispur, most MLA's and ministers have been staying alone in their heavily protected bungalows because the local schools will not admit their children. The chief minister himself has sent his son away to Narendrapur Ramakrishna Mission School in Calcutta.

Saikia claims that the rigours of this "social boycott" are gradually relaxing because "how long can the agitators avoid meeting the lawmakers and the ministers". But the alienation is inevitable in a situation where the Congress(I) came to power by securing less than 10 per cent of the popular votes.

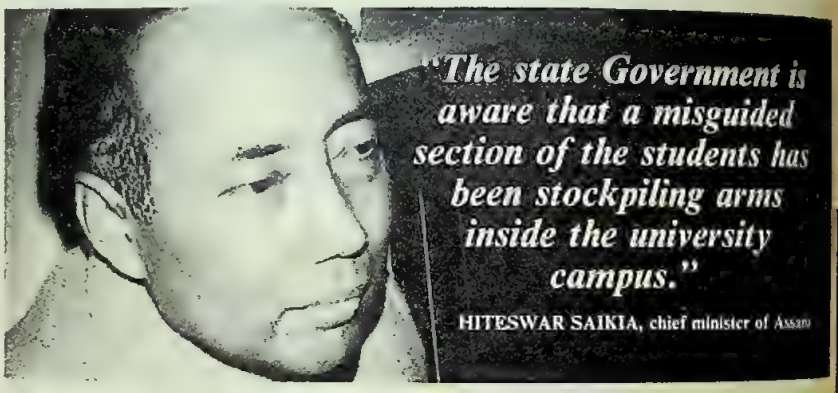
Despite Saikia's smooth public relations, a lot of the Assamese people are not prepared to accept the ambiguous verdict of the 1983 assembly elections. The students and the youth are offensive towards the MLA's and the ministers. The budget for the Gauhati University could be passed by the court only at a meeting surreptitiously held at the Stadium Guest House. Earlier, the student members had refused to allow the seven MLA members to be present. At Dibrugarh University, the budget could be passed only after the MLA member had been "ejected" from the meeting by the students.

So pervasive is the hatred of the Saikia Government that even retired judges of the high court talk of "violence" as the "only method" to end the "illegal regime". When Tridib Sharma, a Gauhati Engineering College student who had allegedly tried to shoot the chief minister, was produced in court, he was hugged and kissed by a crowd of 25 women.

Hated as he is by the caste Hindu Assamese, Saikia's only constituency seems to be the tea-garden labourers, the Nepalis and the Bengali-speaking people. Last fortnight, he drove across Jagi Road and Nellie, towards Nowgong. On the way, the Bengali-speaking people of Nellie had put up welcome arches for him. Braving the continuous downpour, a large crowd had assembled to listen to him speak. However, in Assamese-dominated Nowgong, his meetings were attended only by the local Congress(I) brass, the minorities and the officials.

HOWEVER, Saikia derives comfort from the surrender of some of the armed terrorists—about 35 since last year—in Dibrugarh and Nowgong districts. The most significant of them is Babul Neog, 23, who was allegedly involved in a bombing case at the coal town of Mergherita in 1981, leading to the death of 14 persons.

But Saikia's initiatives have so far failed to yield results in the two worst



HITESWAR SAIKIA

"The movement is fruitless"

HITESWAR Saikia, frail but sprightly, can be ranked as the country's most closely guarded chief minister. One crosses three metal detectors to get into his official residence at Dispur. He is genial but tough, sweet in his conversation but a great believer in sorting out the political problems by the use of the administrative machinery. Excerpts:

Q. ***How do you assess the present state of the anti-foreigner movement?***

A. The movement has died down, or is about to die down. Despite a few stray terrorist activities, there is no noticeable sign of the movement ever being able to pick up its old tempo. Many of the terrorists have surrendered, and the new generation of students is simply not bothered about the agitation.

Q. ***But the AASU leaders are still there at the Gauhati University, and they still claim to control the movement.***

A. In that case, the people of Assam have given a befitting reply to their tall claim by ignoring their calls for Assam bandh and road blockade. As a matter of fact, the Government is aware of the activities of a misguided section of the students, or the so-called students, who have been stockpiling arms inside the university campus. They are compelling the Government to take strong measures.

Q. ***Why do you think the appeal of the movement is petering out?***

A. Because I have been able to convince the people that the movement is fruitless—that in spite of the movement they have not been able to drive out a single foreigner since 1979 whereas we in the Congress were able to push back thousands of them earlier under the Pakistani Infiltration Prevention (PIP) scheme. The people have now lost faith in these agitators.

Q. ***Should the general elections take place in Assam pending a solution to the foreigners problem?***

A. It is for the Election Commission to decide. But as long as there is no amendment to the Representation of the people Act, the electoral rolls in Assam have to be prepared on the basis of the rolls meant for the last assembly or parliamentary elections.

Q. ***So on what basis is the Government of India talking to AASU leaders?***

A. I am not a party to the talks.

Q. ***There is a general impression that the Centre has almost agreed to make 1971 the cut-off year. So, if post 1971 immigrants are allowed to exercise their franchise now, won't that vitiate the atmosphere for talks?***

A. The talks are not time-bound. Nor is it possible now to go back to the voters' list of 1971 without amending the Representation of the People Act.

Q. ***Do you disapprove of the talks?***

A. No. A solution to the problem is possible only through talks. The Centre should not talk to the AASU alone. Talks with the boys began under the President's Rule. Now there is an elected government here.

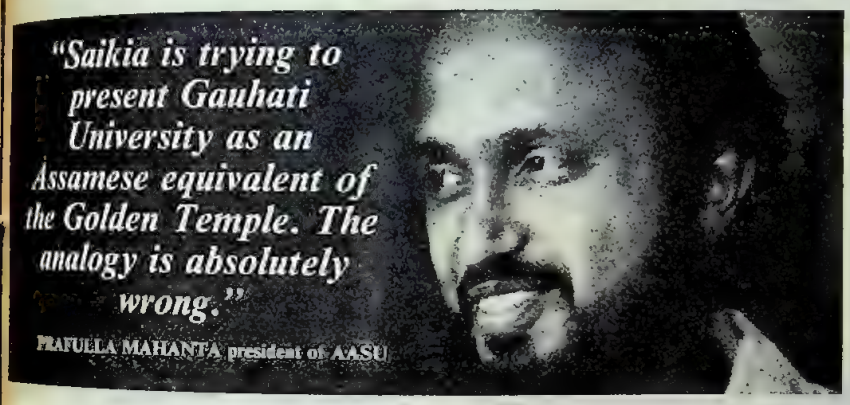
affected districts, Darrang and Sonitpur, where extremist activities are concentrated now. Sonitpur is also the base for the Assam People's Liberation Army (APLA), a Marxist-Leninist outfit that has links with the Manipuri and Naga insurgents. Police officials attribute most of the recent violence to the APLA, and admit that while the "real menace" has not been tackled, only a few "spent forces" have been netted in. Some of the state Government's showpiece extremists are even to be found near police offices, ready to give "interviews" to the media.

Pitted against the growing appeal of extremism, the patently conciliatory leadership of the AASU is under considerable stress. It has not seen a plenary conference, which elects the executive, in the last five years and many of its erstwhile leaders have either dropped out of the scene or have become police agents. And the aggressive policies of the Congress(I)—at Dispur as well as in New Delhi—are pushing the AASU moderates further back to the wall whereas the real control now seems to be inexorably passing into the hands of an emergent hard core led by Joynath Sharma, the seniormost executive member who stays away from the glare of publicity but is credited with a personal following in every subsidiary unit. The moderates can win the day only if they can pin down the Centre on an agreement. Otherwise they might be overwhelmed by the ultras who do not want the AASU to talk to Delhi again in August, unless an assurance is given of postponement of polls in Assam pending a solution to the foreigners problem.

The Assamese obviously want peace. As J.M. Chowdhury, the vice-chancellor of Gauhati University, says: "We don't want a permanent movement." Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, the Jnanpith award-winning novelist, president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (a constituent of the AAGSP) and vice-president of the Sahitya Akademi, bitterly complains about "the eclipse of civil liberties" in Assam, which he describes as a "police state". The maintenance of law and order has drained out the exchequer: in 1983-84, the state Government spent Rs 65 crore on the police but only Rs 23 crore on health and family planning.

The legal course to solve the problem has failed. Only 98 complaints are now pending before the nine tribunals that have been set up since last year to detect and push back illegal immigrants through a vexatiously dilatory procedure. Only the political course of negotiation is open to the Government. But instead of making use of it, the Centre is only trying to sweep the problem under the mat.

—SUMIT MITRA in Assam



PRAFULLA MAHANTA

"We don't want blood shed"

PRAFULLA Mahanta and Bhrigu Phukan, president and general secretary respectively of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), still live in the hostels of the Gauhati University from where they triggered a state-wide movement in 1979. Mahanta is now doing his masters in law while Phukan is preparing for his M.A. in political science. Recently Mahanta spoke to INDIA TODAY *Correspondent* SUMIT MITRA. *Excerpts:*

Q. *It is five years now that you have been associated with the movement, and not with success. Aren't you tired?*

A. We are not tired now, just as we were not tired earlier. The new generation of students feels that foreigners' issue is the most important issue.

Q. *Your bandh calls are not half as successful as they used to be earlier.*

A. This is because the state Government is using its administrative machinery to terrorise people. As a matter of fact, they want from us more drastic programmes.

Q. *If you want to agitate against the Government, why are you talking to the Centre?*

A. In the hope that a solution to the problem will emerge. But now it seems that there is no solution in sight. So we have to be back in the streets.

Q. *What is the main snag?*

A. The main snag is the non-committal attitude of the Centre, and its apparent determination to impose another election on the people without weeding the foreigners out of the electoral rolls. The Congress(I) perhaps thinks that it can wear the movement out, but that will never happen.

Q. *You want to share power—is that so?*

A. We want a settlement to the foreigners problem.

Q. *Don't you wish to involve the state Government in talks?*

A. Where is the state Government in Assam? Do you call the 1983 election a democratic election? Are these ministers and MLA's representatives of the people? Is Hiteswar Saikia an elected, legitimate chief minister? Why should he participate in talks?

Q. *He is saying that you people are using the hostels as a hide-out for criminals.*

A. Why can't he prove it? Actually he is trying to present these hostels of the Gauhati University as an Assamese equivalent of the Golden Temple. The analogy is absolutely wrong. There are no arms here. There are no extremists here. This place has no immunity against police raids.

Q. *How can you guarantee that there will be no holocaust like Nellie this time too?*

A. The Government will be solely responsible if such a thing happens. On our part we are warning all our workers and supporters against the possible danger of subversive elements infiltrating our ranks. We only want the foreigners to be disenfranchised and deported. We don't want bloodshed.



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AHMEDABAD

Pots of History

ON THE outskirts of Ahmedabad, in a large thatched building, with mud-paved floors is a unique museum of utensils. Visitors to the museum see an unbelievable spectacle of over 3,000 vessels of all imaginable sizes and shapes and intricate designs made of brass, copper and bronze. Hung on the walls or tastefully displayed on raised wood-topped platforms, each exhibit is accompanied by a short note on its history. The museum is only three years old and is still growing. As Surendra Patel, the man behind the project, says ambitiously: "To make the museum truly representative of every part of the country, I have to collect many more."

The idea was conceived in a moment of pure impulse. In Sihor to buy giant brass vessels from a junk dealer to decorate his restaurant 10 km outside Ahmedabad, Patel was suddenly struck by the fact that the numerous old and rare metal utensils he was seeing were going to be melted down. "I suddenly realised that all those rare and beautiful utensils will be no more. A heritage would be lost. Struck by virtual madness, I stopped the junksmith and begged of him not to destroy the utensils. Strangely, he understood me and agreed to collect rare utensils and sell them to me at the price of junk."

Working tirelessly, within three months Patel had collected 2,000 utensils from all over Gujarat. When his own money ran out, he secured bank loans and set up the museum at a cost of Rs 7.5 lakh. The state Government sanctioned him a grant of only Rs 10,000. Patel said that only recently he repaid his loans and retrieved his wife Smita's jewellery, which had been given as security. The museum is run by the Vishala Environmental Centre for Art, Architecture and Research, a trust formed by Patel.



BHAWAN SINGH

The museum and (inset) Patel: preserving heritage

Supporting Patel in realising his dream of a utensils museum is Dr Jyotindra Jain, an art historian. Both of them have spent hours carefully documenting and photographing each item. Trying to explain this passion for old utensils, Jain said: "Despite this age of highly mechanised technology where everything is mass produced for a mass compromise, some have started to perceive creations of rural craftsmen who emphasised taste. By doing this, they find relief from their despair. Old utensils, for example, lift us from the present to the past due to their sensibility and sensitivity."

Being common objects of daily use, a visitor can identify them and spend hours examining these rare samples. The vessels instantly convey the skill of its creators for each has been made with much thought and precision. For example, the utensils traditionally used for carrying water from the well was shaped to fit snugly into a woman's hip, with the lower half having a rough surface so that it would not slip off. Those used for cooking had a bulging bottom with slanting sides and a broad ringed mouth spreading outwards so that smoke from the fireplace would not enter the food.

"Every utensil here has a story to tell," said Indra Shankar Ravel, the research officer at the museum. The big vessel to churn buttermilk has been ringed with little bells to make the churner's job more pleasurable. Metal rolling-pins have been filled with pebbles. Metal scrubbers too jingle as a signal to the men to keep away from the village pond while the women bathed. A bowl used to crush and mix opium has a snake's hood as a snout, to remind the user that he is consuming a deadly mixture.

Equally exciting is the section of the museum which houses Patel's extraordinary 19-year-old nutcracker collection. There are 830 nutcrackers of different shapes and lengths—from a minute one inch to 18 inches ones. As pan chewing was an important ritual, nutcrackers too have attracted meticulous detail. The rich often used ones made of gold or silver inlaid with precious stones. There are some which have multiple uses and can be converted into a dagger at a moment's notice, or into a nail cutter. Some were sculpted into erotic figures and were used by courtesans to woo their admirers.

—RAMESH MENON


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CSC

The Freedom Form

COMPUTERS had always fascinated 16-year-old Ajay Mehta, but he had no hope of ever getting to handle one. Then a few months ago, he walked into the Community Science Centre (CSC) at Ahmedabad and before long he started learning computer operating. Today, he has graduated to making programmes. The reason is that the CSC is a unique open school where any student or adult can walk in and without paying a fee, experiment on anything which deals with science. Says an excited Mehta: "I never thought I could handle a computer as it seemed so sophisticated."

Started in 1966 by the late visionary Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the CSC follows the philosophy that to learn effectively, children must grow in an atmosphere of freedom. And it is freedom which has helped scores of students to develop thinking and creativity. School students pour in at various hours of the day to discover the mysteries of the world. To quench their thirst for scientific knowledge, CSC has separate laboratories for physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics, a playroom with over 150 educational toys and an audio-visual unit where they can paint, draw, see slide shows or even learn photography. Here children just pick up sheets of drawing paper and paint and let their imagination run. Says Shilpa Ranade, 11, excitedly: "The freedom we have here makes us so happy. Our schools should have been like this."

On Sundays and holidays the centre is crowded with students doing all kinds of experiments. Scientists offer advice only if students ask for it. Freedom is the key word. Children get busy dissecting a frog or an insect, learn how they function and find out why animals behave the way they do. Others get down to more complicated experiments like fabricating electronic gadgets, wireless sets or even model rockets.

The atmosphere of freedom, apart from stimulating the mental faculties of a child also instills a sense of responsibility. Though 10,000 children annually use the playroom, the cost of breakage and thefts has worked out to only Rs 150 last year. Points out Ramesh Kothari who heads the unit: "Children can bloom only if they are left alone and trusted."

To familiarise students with the intricacies of nature, the centre takes students on nature trips to forests, mountains or sea-shores. Students are asked to patiently watch animals—their movements, habits and behaviour. They jot down their observations, discuss them and clear long-lingering doubts. While walking through a forest, children are told about the environment and its delicate balance.

A rocket club has recently been started at CSC where students make and fire rockets. Initially, students make cardboard rockets and use gunpowder as fuel. Later, bigger models with fuel obtained from the space centre at Thumba were introduced. After the rockets are fired, students discuss why some of them crashed. Mistakes are rarely repeated.

A radio club helps students learn basic principles of sound waves, radio circuits, electricity, magnetism and transmission on the morse code. Students build wireless sets and speak to radio hams in various corners of the world. An astronomy section at the centre helps stargazers absorb the poetry of the skies. Computers is another area catching the imagination of youngsters. In the last two years, over 150 programmes have been formulated by students at the centre.

Sarabhai and a few other scientists at the Physical Research Laboratory started the CSC to stimulate innovations and experiments in science education. The centre uses the inquiry method of teaching which conventional schools spurn. In the mid-'70s, the centre selected major science topics from the school syllabus and developed six volumes on how they should be taught through the inquiry method. They were aimed to stimulate the thinking process of students, motivate them to develop a questioning mind and build confidence. The volumes were sent to 100 schools and eager CSC scientists waited for a feedback. It never came. Curious to know what had happened, CSC invited principals of various schools for a discussion. They candidly admitted that the techniques suggested were undoubtedly very good and worked, but teachers were hesitant to follow them: it was easier to lecture on two experiments in a 35-minute class than to have each student do them.

The centre being an open house caters to children who come in chauffeur-driven cars and also those who drop in from a nearby slum. And to impart concepts effectively, these children have to be talked to differently. For example, once when Chinoy tried talking to slum children on why dirty water should not be consumed, it did not register. So a cup of water was taken from a nearby cesspool and the slum children were shown living micro-organisms.

The centre spends just about Rs 8 lakh a year on running expenses, 70 per cent being met by the National Council for Educational Research and Training and the balance by the state Government, thus proving that it doesn't cost too much to generate creativity among students.

—RAMESH MENON

CSC radio club (below) and rocket club: innovative methods

Photographs by ABHAY KOTHARI





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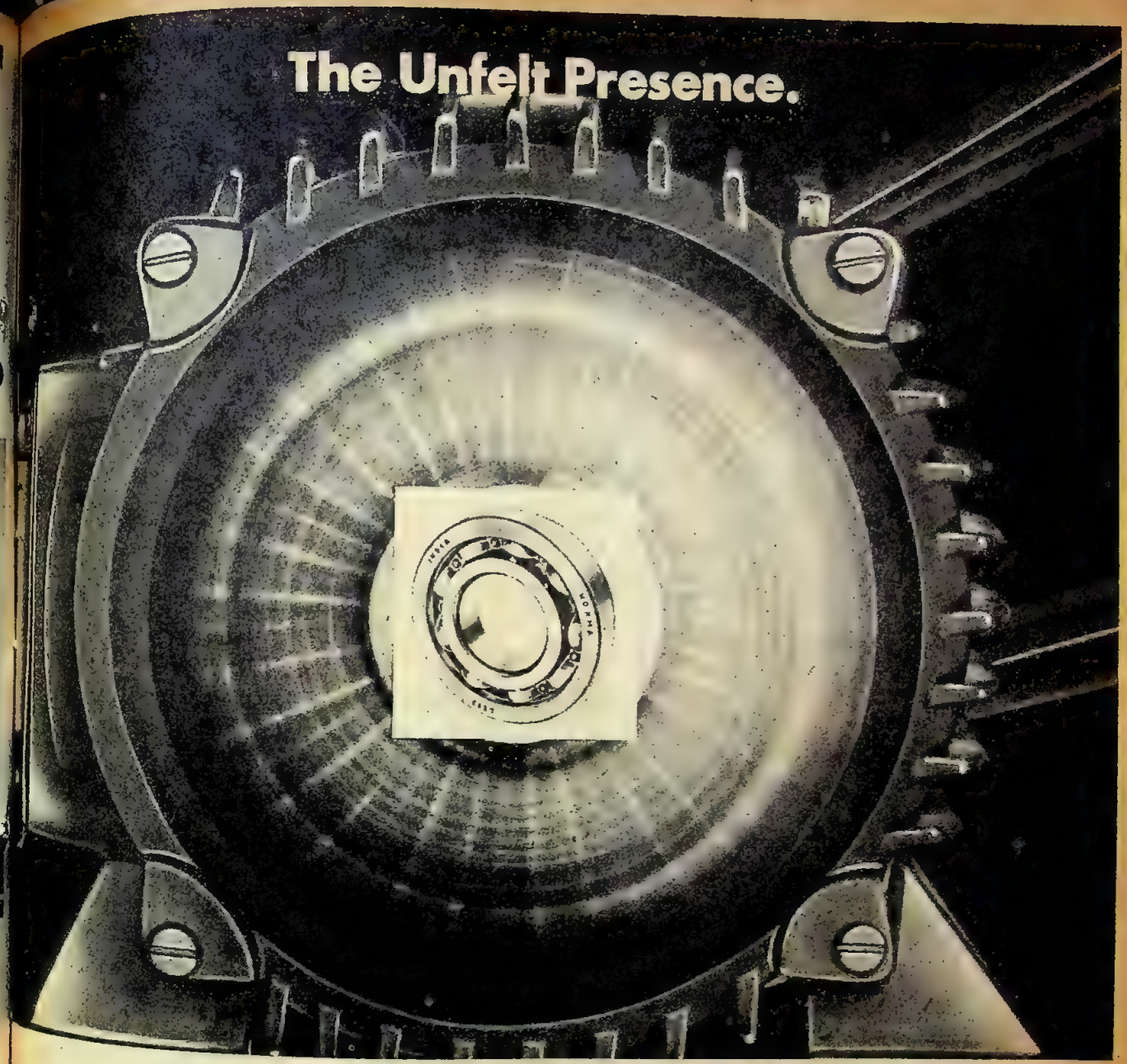
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MAHARASHTRA

The College Craze

MAHARASHTRA'S enviable reputation for its high educational standards now seems sorely threatened by the state Government's policy of allowing an abnormal proliferation of private medical and engineering colleges. Principal correspondent COOMI KAPOOR reports:

THE MAHARASHTRA Government's decision to experiment with private medical colleges has raised a predictable storm of protest. Despite strong resistance from the medical fraternity, the state Government gave clearance to three new private colleges this academic year. Last fortnight 4,500 resident doctors from 12 public hospitals all over the state started an indefinite strike to show their displeasure over the Government's move. Said J.G. Lalmani, President, Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD): "Private Medical colleges are just an excuse for the Government to legalise corruption. It is commercialisation and politicisation of the medical profession and will lead to a big fall in academic standards."

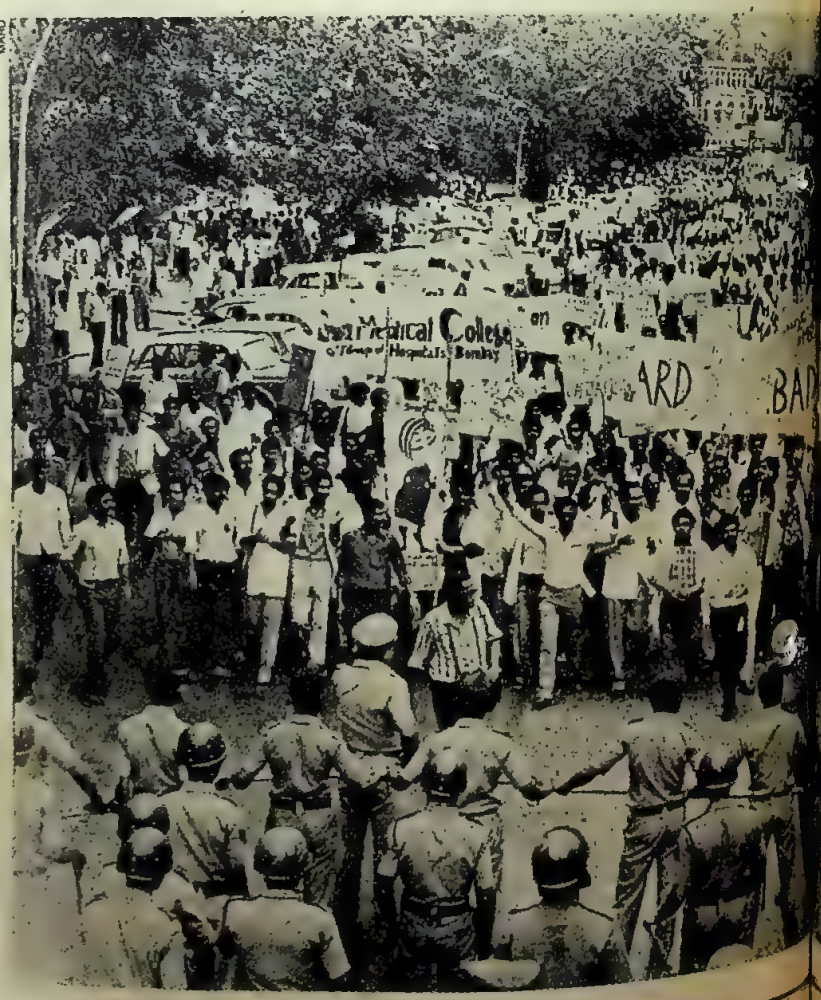
The MARD cause has won the support of most of the medical establishment. The All-India Medical Association, the Maharashtra Medical Officers Association and the Medical Insurance Practitioners Association as well as private individuals such as playwright Vijay Tendulkar and former prime minister Morarji Desai—who termed the admission fees for the colleges "daylight robbery"—have pledged support.

But Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil is in no mood to compromise. He feels that if the state did not sanction private medical colleges, Maharashtra's talent and money would just go across the border to the capitation colleges of Karnataka. The new colleges in Maharashtra will also give a chance to poor students the state Government feels. Annoyed by the MARD strike, 11 Congress(I) MLA's even demanded that the degrees of the striking doctors be derecognised. And the Government last fortnight handed out show cause notices to resident doctors at Miraj, Sholapur, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Sangli and Pune terminating their services and asking them to vacate their quarters.

Critics of the Government's policy point out that while the new colleges are technically not charging capitation fees for 80 per cent of the seats, the annual fee of Rs. 30,000 and the stipulation that fees for the entire four-and-a-half years of the course be paid in advance worked out to a capitation of Rs 1.35 lakh at the time of admission. The poor are thus ruled out. Of the 100 seats in each of the three new medical colleges, 20 will be allotted by the Government, 30 will be filled by local students and 30 decided on merit. The remaining 20 seats are to be filled at the discretion of the management, which is free to charge what the market will bear. As Dr N.S. Mhaske, medical superintendent of the Pravara Trust College, Loni, puts it: "For these 20 seats there will be unlimited capitation."

In the face of an impending judicial stay that may be obtained by the MARD, the three organisations, the Pravara Medical Trust in Loni, the Krishna Medical Centre, Karad, and the Shivaji Shikshan Sansthan in Amravati are working overtime to get their colleges built and open for students by the first week of August so that they can get a counter-stay from the court by pleading that they have already admitted students and built classrooms. They have a tough job ahead of them. Both the Pravara and Krishna trusts have no college or hostel buildings. At Pravara some of the hospital wards have been cleared out to accommodate classrooms and at Loni temporary barracks have been built for hostels.

Though the Medical Council of India (MCI) lays down a requirement of one professor for 10 students and a much higher ratio of lecturers, the Krishna Medical Centre has at present only three professors and two lecturers and the Pravara trust college only three professors. Pravara does not have any rules for admission, though it expects applicants to fill out a form saying they have



read the rules and agree to abide by them. Neither college has obtained university affiliation so far. MCI standards also state that there should be a ratio of one student for every seven patients, on which count both the Pravara Trust College and Krishna Centre fall far short. Still, at least both these sugar lobby bosses—Vasantdada Patil and Y.B. Chavan are trustees of Krishna and Vikhe Patil, chairman of the Maharashtra Sugar Cooperatives Federation, is managing trustee of Pravara—have hospitals. The third institution granted permission, the Shivaji Shikshan Sansthan, does not even have a hospital of its own. Remarked Dr V.K. Gandhi, dean of the faculty of medicine, Bombay University, and an executive member of the MCI: "The only department in these colleges which is well staffed is the accounts section, which is all set to collect Rs 2 crore within the next two weeks."

"Private medical colleges are just an excuse for the Government to legalise corruption"

J.G. LALMANI
President, MARD



Since the MCI, which is the statutory body for the regulation of medical standards in the country, was not consulted by the Maharashtra Government before sanctioning the colleges, the three state colleges join six other unrecognised medical colleges in the country. This means that the graduates will not be entitled to practice medicine outside their state. The MCI is perturbed by the Maharashtra Government's move, because it fears an adverse effect on the high standing of the Indian MBBS degree which is today recognised in most parts of the world. Its fears are only increased by the fact that 30 more institutions have applied to the state Government for permission.

While the experiment in private medical education is just about to start, the experience of the state in creating a plethora of engineering colleges and polytechnics is hardly encouraging. The Government's announcement last year that anyone who wanted to start an engineering college or polytechnic was welcome to apply for permission resulted in the number of engineering colleges in the state increasing from five to 40, with a corresponding increase in seats from 1,800 to 8,000. At the same time engineer-







(clockwise from extreme left) MARD protesters on the march; hectic construction activity at Krishna Medical College and a ward of Pravara College hastily emptied to accommodate a classroom.

ing polytechnics increased fourfold from 30 to 120 and their yearly intake of would-be engineers went up from 5,000 to 18,000.

These engineering colleges must have been considered lucrative propositions judging by the alacrity with which politicians of all hues secured permission to start them on behalf of institutions with which they are connected—sugar factories, temple trusts or educational and social institutes. While Education Minister Sudhakar Naik insisted: "We will not compromise on standards in granting permission," in fact the only criteria the Government stressed was a deposit of Rs 30 lakh in the bank and possession of a minimum amount of land. In cases where even this requirement could not be met, the Government settled for a Rs 10 lakh deposit, overlooking other essentials such as minimum staff, laboratories, workshops and equipment.

The universities had little say in the matter. Last year, for example, most of the new engineering colleges admitted students long before they had gained university affiliation. This year the Vasantdada Patil Pratishthan, a trust named after the chief minister and controlled by his family, received government clearance to start an engineering college without bothering to apply to Bombay University, though the college has yet to construct a building. But the university is hardly in a position to protest. A bill passed by the Maharashtra legislature last year stated that the chancellor of the university, who is the state governor, has the power to overrule the vice-chancellor in matters of affiliation.

The Government settled for a Rs 10 lakh deposit, overlooking other essentials such as minimum staff, laboratories, workshops and equipment.

As a result, though the number of engineering colleges has gone up, the quality of their product has hardly kept pace. For example the overall pass percentage in 10 newly started colleges in Pune is around 24.8 per cent. This does not take into account the results of 387 students in Jalgaon, Ahmednagar and Dhule whose results have been held up for mass copying. Five colleges in Pune University have not succeeded in getting a single student to pass the second semester. These colleges include the Puje Sane Guruji Vidya Prasarak Mandal in Shahada, Dhule, whose trust chairman is P.K. Patil, Janata MLA and president of the Maharashtra Janata Party; the Shivaji Vidya Prasarak Sansthan, Dhule, with which Congress (I) MLA Roidas Patil is connected and the College of Engineering, Kopergaon, controlled by Congress (I) MLA Shankarrao Kolhe.

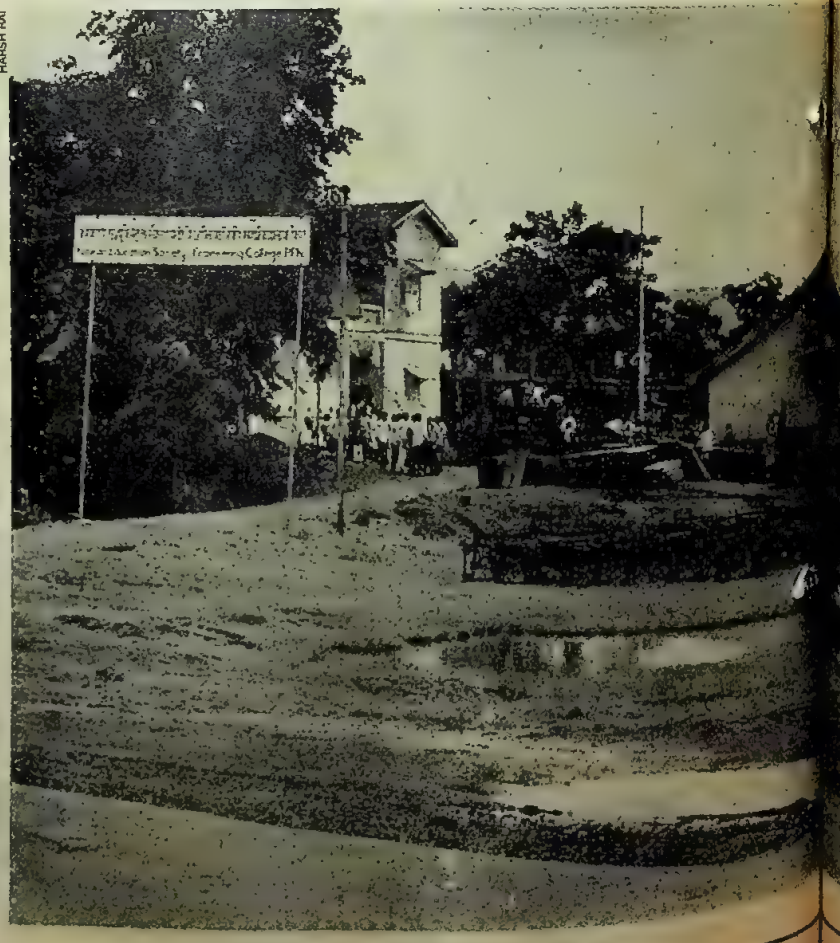
Results from other university centres are equally depressing. In Amravati University the pass percentage is 25.23 per cent, in Shivaji University 55.8 per cent—with the college floated by the chief minister's sugar cooperative, Vasantraodada Patil Institute of Technology, securing only 26.47 per cent. In Marathwada University the pass percentage of six colleges was 16.7. In addition, in two colleges in Udgri and Nilanga, the results of 415 students are held up because of mass copying.

The official pass results provided by the Government reflect a brighter picture simply because under the liberal university rules a large number of students who have failed in one or two subjects have been Allowed To Keep Terms (ATKT). With ATKT passes taken into consideration Marathwada University's pass percentage increases to 28.25, Amravati University's to 98.2, Pune University's to 60, and Shivaji University's to 80. Second semester results for Nagpur and Bombay universities have yet to be declared.

The woes of the engineering college students are nothing compared to the plight of the students registered at the new engineering polytechnics. These students complain of a total lack of qualified staff in many polytechnics. For example at one polytechnic in Aurangabad district the principal was also a student. The Neimnath Jain Bramhacharyashram Polytechnic, Nasik, changed principals three times during the academic year and the present incumbent is a B.Ed.; the Tirupati Polytechnic in Akola has a principal with a B.A. while the Sant Muktabai Polytechnic in Jalgaon has one diploma holder who teaches all the courses.

Practicals are performed in factories and leaking sheds, and standard equipment such as drill machines and shaping machines is lacking. The Tirupati

HARSH RAI



lytechnic has no workshop or laboratory for applied mechanics while the Muktabai Polytechnic has its workshop in a sugar factory and holds classes in the warehouse. At the Girananjani Polytechnic in Jalgaon the library does not have a single book. A polytechnic in Bombay finished its entire applied course in one week with the help of a touring lecturer from the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute (VJTI).

For this second-rate teaching students pay through the nose. Despite the state Government's stipulation that fees for polytechnics should only be in the range of Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,500, they charge whatever the market will bear. A check in some polytechnics in Dhule and Ahmednagar showed they were charging fees ranging from Rs 6,000 to Rs 10,000. Apart from fees many colleges levy donations without giving receipts. The now defunct Kannamwar Engineering College, the only college to honestly but rather naively acknowledge its capitation fees by putting an advertisement in a Nagpur newspaper, was the only one to get its government permission withdrawn as a consequence.

All this does not perturb J.G. Bodhe, a leading engineer of the state who has been in charge of the committee set up by the Government to review the colleges and who is to submit his report to the university. Says Bodhe: "We started this scheme knowing full well that 50 per cent of the institutions will not come up to the standard and die along the way." Bodhe feels that the law of survival of the fittest will prevail and that if the colleges do not have facilities they must borrow temporarily. "In three or four years the institutions will be fully equipped. And then we will get a true picture," he says.

With the state turning out such a large number of degree and diploma engineers in a few years' time, the rate of unemployment among engineers could go up substantially, fears the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), an advisory body to the Ministry of Education. The state Government bypassed the western region board of the AICTE just as it did the MCI. In fact the Government before launching its ambitious private engineering colleges plan did not even assess future manpower requirements.

All India employment agency statistics show that in 1975 there were 18,000 graduate engineers and 55,000 diploma engineers who were unemployed. By 1980 the figure had gone up to 22,000 graduate engineers and 90,000 diploma engineers and by now the number of engineers unemployed in the country could be around 1.5 lakh. In Maharashtra, despite the greater employment potential provided by Bombay city there were 5,300 diploma holders and 1,000 degree holders listed in the employment agencies. Though the southern states may have been the trend-setters in establishing private colleges, Maharashtra has entered the field with a vengeance. But with the many colleges springing up, it may be difficult for the state to maintain its reputation for high standards in education. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat seem all set to follow Maharashtra's lead and if nothing else soon enough the many new colleges will find someone to staff them.

Engineering Colleges

	pass percentage
10 newly started colleges in Pune	24.8%
6 colleges in Marathwada University	16.7%
Amravati University	25.2%
Shivaji University	55.8%
Vasantraodada Patil Institute of Technology (Shivaji University)	26.4%

In Udgri and Nilanga results of 415 students in two colleges have been held up for mass copying.





HARSH RAI

Engineering college at Pen (left) and the free-bench classroom in the corridor of the engineering polytechnic in Bombay.

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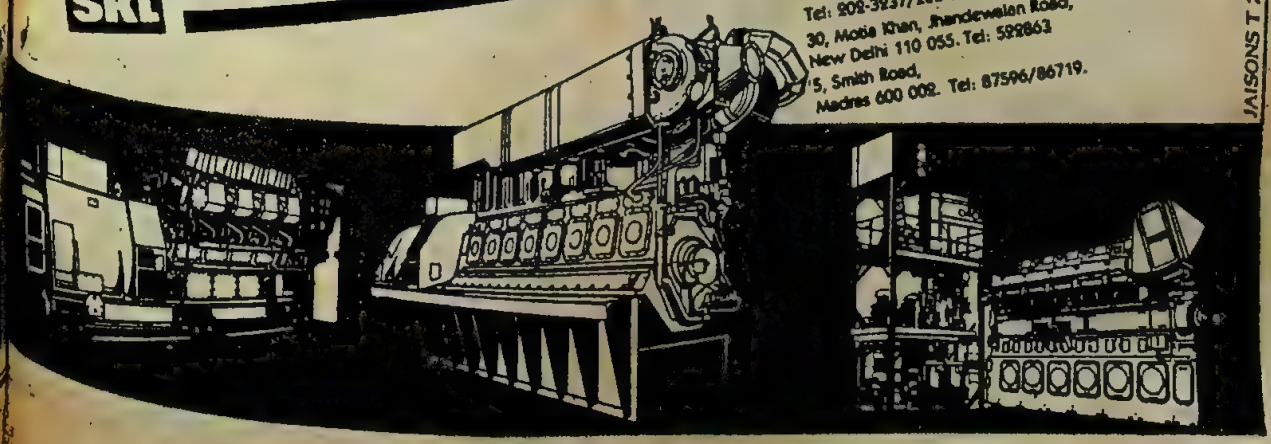
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Malhotra and Sharma: earthly problems

■ Space heroes **Rakesh Sharma** and **Ravish Malhotra** made it to outer space and back in one piece, but their cars—Nissan Chevy for Sharma and a Toyota Corolla for Malhotra—which they bought in Europe didn't quite get home as safely. Last week when the cosmonauts arrived eagerly at Bombay's Indira docks to drive home their shiny new pair of wheels, they found, instead, several dents on the roof and the window panes smashed. While the Scindia Steam Navigation Company's Chairperson Sumati Morarji has promised to look into the matter, the heroes have a new worry: they will still have to pay 180 per cent customs duty on their damaged vehicles, and as a mournful Sharma said: "The customs never waive duty, that is their custom."

■ When **Om Puri** put on a khaki police uniform for **Govind Nihalani**'s *Ardh Satya*, he hit his audience just as hard as he could. Both Puri and Nihalani are getting kudos the world over for that blow. Om Puri walked away with the Best Actor Award at the prestigious Karlovy Vary film festival in Czechoslovakia and in India Nihalani was selected best director of the year by the ten best directors of the country. Never before perhaps on our song-soaked screen has appeared a film that chills the heart quite as much as *Ardh Satya* does in its unsparing portrayal of the brutalisation of an honest man. Nihalani had claimed that "Om Puri's face was the key to the whole film", but said Puri in a television interview: "*Ardh Satya* was easy because the part is emotionally close to me."



Puri in *Ardh Satya*: international accolade

■ This is not the year of women, but it could well be considering the number of fair damsels who are making it in the seamy world of politics. The latest is **Arti**, the top Kannada film heroine who has been nominated to the Legislative Council. The slim 30-year-old humbly admits to being a lamb in the blase world of politics. But, she is already picking up the right phrases: 'I don't want to become a minister" and "If I get in I must achieve something. If I can't, I must quit." Now there's a familiar ring.



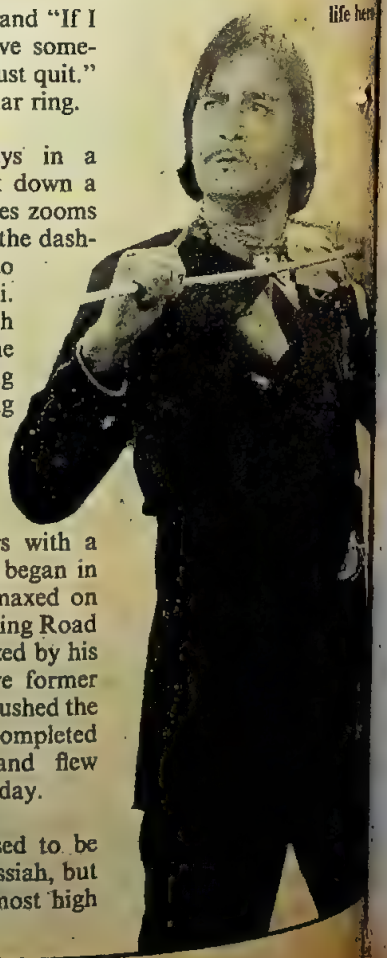
Arti: glamour politics

■ Three bad guys in a speeding taxi knock down a little girl. A Mercedes zooms up at the scene and the dashing hero jumps on to the roof of the taxi. The taxi crashes with another car and the courageous, bleeding hero is able to bring the culprits to justice. **Sunil Dutt** became quite the public hero when he entertained shoppers with a real-life drama that began in Santa Cruz and climaxed on Bombay's busy Linking Road last fortnight. Unfazed by his adventure, the suave former sheriff of Bombay brushed the dust off his collar, completed police formalities and flew off abroad the next day.

■ He was supposed to be Bombay's traffic messiah, but **P.S. Pasricha**, the most high profile traffic policeman in the country, got a rude stop signal last month. Instead of being allowed to complete his noble plans to unsnarl the city's hair-ried traffic, Pasricha was unceremoniously replaced. Pasricha—a poet in his spare time—gave vent to his grief with a couplet: "In the city of the blind where is there place for a man who sells mirrors?" Things are clearly going from bad to verse for our dejected traffic cop.



Pasricha: copping out



Dutt: reel-life hero



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TODAY
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PUNJAB'S AGONY

The solution to the Punjab crisis is neither elusive nor complicated (cover story, August 15). However, if the Doordarshan continues its so-called sympathetic coverage, then perhaps the solution will remain elusive for ever. It is wrong to blame the Sikhs alone for the present deadlock. The Government is also responsible.

Bangalore RAMANAND SHARMA

■ Baba Santa Singh's decision is worthy of applause. Whatever the motivation—the repair of the heap of broken images that is India—is the actual *kar sewa*. It is a praiseworthy endeavour which cannot but rekindle hope.

Meerut RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

■ The sketch depicting the army's attack on the Golden Temple and the counter attack by the terrorists was excellent.

Chandigarh VANEET CHAWLA

Though the cover story on *kar sewa* was well-written, I frankly feel that it has been given too much coverage. It would have been appreciated if you had a colour photo feature about the whole operation instead.

Bangalore M.N. KIRAN KUMAR

USUAL SCAPEGOAT

Your Comment "The Foreign Hand Syndrome" (August 15) is one with which everyone should agree. It is true that every time there is trouble the Government says it is not because of our own weaknesses or inefficiency but because of the 'foreign hand'. It provides a convenient veil for the Government every time there is chaos in Assam, Punjab or anywhere else. When the Government cries foreign hand it means, in fact, only America and Pakistan. But how is the foreign hand in any way remotely responsible for lawlessness, inflation, bribes, rapes and the other problems?

Agra S.C. MATHUR

FAROOQ'S OUSTER

Your Cover Story "The Family Coup" (July 31) on the ouster of Farooq Abdullah and the installation of G.M. Shah was a pointer to the destruction of democracy and how a democratically elected government had been dethroned. Though Farooq may have lost his majority in the Assembly, he should still have been given a chance.

Calcutta S. DAS

■ The ouster of Farooq Abdullah can aptly be called a travesty of democracy and an act which was wholly unconstitutional and unjustified. To make matters worse the office of the chief minister has been handed over to a person whose record of corruption and perfidy to the nation's interest can hardly be concealed. The Congress(I) sponsored *Red Book* (a pamphlet) written five years ago lists the charges of corruption against the Shah. Ironically it is the Congress(I) support which has backed and propped up Shah as the chief minister.

Chandigarh SUDERSHAN PAUL

The dismissal of the Farooq ministry by the governor is a clear indication of the Centre's move to drive a wedge in Kashmir politics. The governor, on finding that Farooq has lost the confidence of majority of the MLA's in the Legislative Assembly should have either dissolved the Assembly and imposed President's Rule or should have permitted Farooq to demonstrate his strength in the Assembly rather than allowing a bunch of defectors to take over. Everything may be smooth for Shah so long as he soft pedals with the Centre. With 26 members of the Congress(I) pledging their support for Shah, he has made himself another scapegoat for the Centre to propogate its' policies and have a say in Kashmir.

Valparai GILBERT D'SOUZA

BLEAK SCENARIO

The Comment "Crumbling Norms" (July 31) gives a true picture of the deterioration of the institutions and morals of the Indian public. But you have not mentioned an important dimension—that is our press, which has dete-

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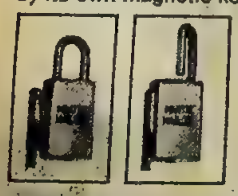
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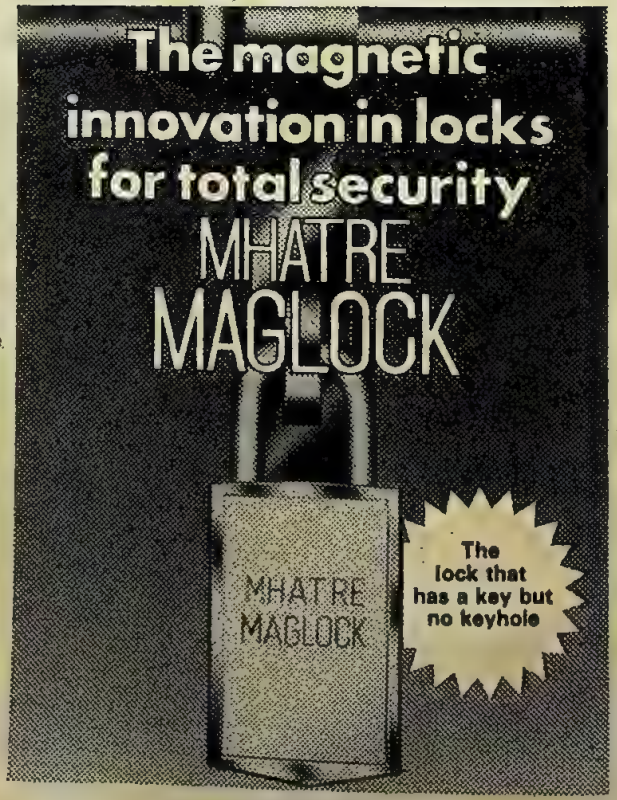
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...erated pathetically in the recent past.

MAHINDRA NAYAK
...neswar

■ The thought-provoking Comment ...was a marvellous write-up analysing, in a ...ra but forceful words, the situation pre...vailing in our country, highlighting the rot ...that has set in our social and political ...order. It is a slow slide into chaos. It is a ...frightening situation, but it would appear ...that we are unable to arrest this suicidal ...trend towards certain disintegration and ...disaster.

You have challenged every reader to ...arise and think. And have tried to alert ...the people to the impending danger and ...create in them the urgency to rise above ...petty squabbles so that the trend could be ...stopped and reversed.

V.I. ITTY
...lore

■ It is sad that while talking about the ...methods of registering dissent you have ...mentioned the hijackings and the recent ...walk-out staged by the chief ministers at ...the planners' meeting in the same breath ...as if both were crimes of the same nature.

Before condemning the chief min...isters' action, we must understand what ...drove them to it. An otherwise strong non-...Congress(I) government was dismissed by ...the governor in Jammu & Kashmir at the ...behest of the Centre and unless the Gov...ernment is strongly condemned, it has ...every likelihood of it turning out to be a ...precedent for other dismissals in the ...remaining non-Congress(I) ruled states. It ...is true that the planners' meeting are not ...the right place to ventilate such griev...ances, but we must concede that extraor...dinary situations demand extraordinary ...methods of protest.

...rabad

SUVARCHALA

BASELESS CHARGES

This refers to your report on IDL Che...micals "Boardroom Fireworks" (July 31), ...where some IDL directors have levelled ...baseless charges against me. These same ...complaints had been made to the Com...pany Law Board, which ruled them as ...frivolous. Moreover, the charges relate to ...decisions made by IDL's board in the early ...'80s. Why did these very directors not ...bring up these issues for more than a de...cade and then bring them up repeatedly ...during the last one year? The objective is ...to divert attention from the main issue, of ...Dr. Nobel not performing on its con...tractual obligations to IDL.

...Nobel's investment in, and loan to, ...Wavin India was decided by the full ...board, my shareholding interest in Wavin ...was disclosed from the beginning, and ...Wavin from 1979 to 1982 had enormous ...growth and profits. I was congratulated ...on this investment at a board meeting.

Hyderabad M. VARADARAJAN

SCARRED IMAGE

In your article "A Scarred State" (July 31) I totally agree with your statement 'the presence of the army may prove a double-edged weapon: the longer it lingers, the more fundamentalist could be the face of new Sikh extremism'. It is true that every Sikh (including myself) feels that they are now extremists in the eyes of the Government.

Calcutta S.S. KAPOOR

STAY ORDER

Your special report on Afghanistan (July 31) was very interesting. When the Kremlin ordered its troops into Afghanistan in December 1979, I did not believe that the Soviet occupation would be a long one. I now realise that throughout its history, the USSR has never withdrawn its troops from places it has invaded.

Kathmandu SANJAY UPADHYA

FACTORY VISIT

In an article entitled "The Invisible Menace" (June 30), a reference was made to my visit to the Kesoram Rayon factory at Tribeni. The article appeared to imply that my visit to the place was connected with my son getting a job in the factory. This is not true. My son was engaged as an apprentice in early 1977 and given a permanent job in August 1979. I became environment minister in June 1982 and visited the area in January 1983

Calcutta BHABANI MUKHERJEE

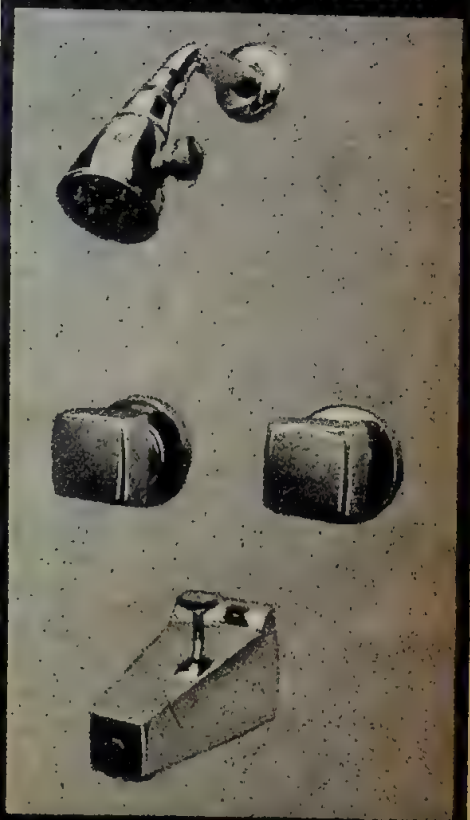
The article merely states the fact that Mr Mukherjee's son has a job in the factory, and does not imply that this was due to his visit there. —Editor

A CLARIFICATION

In the May 15 issue, there was an item about Indian cricketers returning from Sharjah in the Eye-catchers section. Along with Syed Kirmani's photograph, it was stated that he had to pay Rs 45,000 as customs duty. It was not Mr Kirmani but a former test cricketer who paid this sum. We deeply regret the error and the distress caused by any imputation touching the integrity of Mr Kirmani.

—Editor

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The Pre-election Pampering

GENEROUS governmental largesse has now become a routine feature of the pre-election scene, typified once again in recent days by the sharp reduction in the price of wheat supplied to flour mills, the raising of paddy prices paid to farmers, the effort to get the pay commission to announce an interim award of higher house rent and city compensatory allowances to government employees, the reckless increase in the quantities of sugar released into the market despite a looming shortage of stocks aimed at keeping sugar prices low for the consumer, and the widely publicised setting up of one additional television transmitter every day—the better to convey Doordarshan's partisan message. With a few months still to go before polling date, this trickle will inevitably become a flood, and many state governments have started taking their cue from the Centre: Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal, for instance, has been touring the districts in his state and announcing generous concessions.

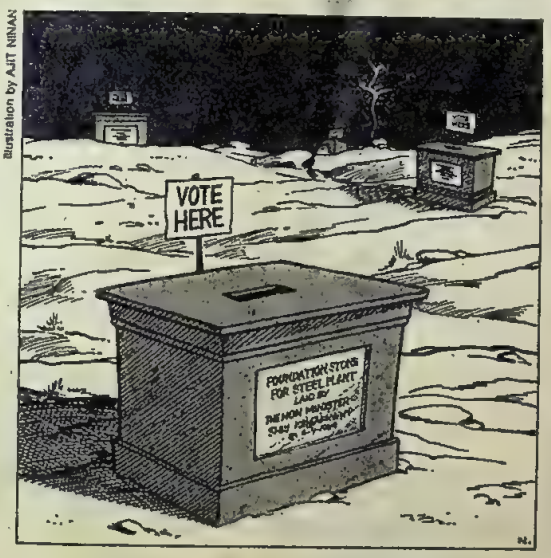


Illustration by AJIT NINAN

This misuse of power has now almost got the sanction of tradition. In the run-up to the 1971 elections, an embattled Mrs Gandhi laid three foundations for new steel plants in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in an effort to win the southern vote. And, in 1974, once again, when elections to the Uttar Pradesh state legislature came round, Mrs Gandhi peppered the state with dozens of foundation-stones. It is a different matter that many of these projects are still to get off the ground—the Vijaynagar steel plant is nowhere in sight, despite the lapse of 14 years, and the Vishakhapatnam steel project is even today strapped for cash and far from complete. In any case, the electorate is often not fooled by the hand-outs: Uttar Pradesh in 1974 gave the Congress(I) only a wafer-thin majority. But the delusion persists that hand-outs win votes, and the Government is once again emptying its coffers in order to buy support.

But there is, now, a difference. Foundation-stones have given way to straight cash: a soft budget last February, reduced taxes on a variety of consumer goods (like refrigerators and TV sets), bank loans given under political supervision, and much else. And tradition or not, this is gross misuse of power and pork-barrel politics at its worst.

Other aspects of the pre-election scene are even murkier. Most notably, fund-raising. Reports are doing the rounds of concessions being handed out to industry in quid pro quo deals involving contributions to elections coffers. The hefty investment subsidy announced for the tyre industry earlier this year might be one good example, and the sharply lowered wheat prices for flour mills might be another since there does not seem to be any condition that the mills pass the benefit on to the consumer. Both are reminiscent of the 1980 episode involving large-scale edible oil imports at election time.

While the cleaning up of Indian election financing is a long neglected task, the picture has changed in some significant ways since the last round. Fund-raising now is far more centralised perhaps because of the leakages of the past, and the hat does not seem to be getting passed around in domestic and industrial circles. Instead, slush funds seem to be getting pocketed on large international deals; and party spending on campaigns in even individual constituencies is closely monitored if not directly handled by a select few. Also, over the years, the pivotal role of election funding in aiding and even abetting the black economy and smuggling has become increasingly obvious, witness the release of smugglers in Bombay.

It is not easy to stop the rot once it has set in so deep. But an effort must be made, and the pre-election months in 1984 are as good a time as any. Also, if the effort is to have a reasonable chance of success, it must come in a comprehensive package and not in piecemeal fashion. First, corporate contributions to elections must be legalised once again. Second, the limit of Rs 35,000 that can be spent by a Lok Sabha candidate must be raised to a realistic level. Third, a ceiling must be imposed on the amount that a party can spend on its total campaign. Fourth, some form of state funding of elections should be introduced, at least on a trial basis to watch the effect. Finally, the accounts of all political parties must be compulsorily audited.

These measures will have the combined effect of reducing the role of money power in elections, of placing a ceiling once again on the amount that can be spent on an election (the ceiling was effectively removed during the Emergency), of ensuring that whatever money is spent is accounted for on both the receipts and expenditure side, and of removing the need for underhand financing and quid pro quo deals. But the import of these measures will go far beyond the elections; for if the organic link between politics and the operations of the black economy is snapped, it will also become possible to launch an attack on the black economy itself. Meanwhile, both the Opposition and the press must play their role in building a climate of opinion where the Government finds it difficult to be profligate with public funds in distributing pre-election largesse.

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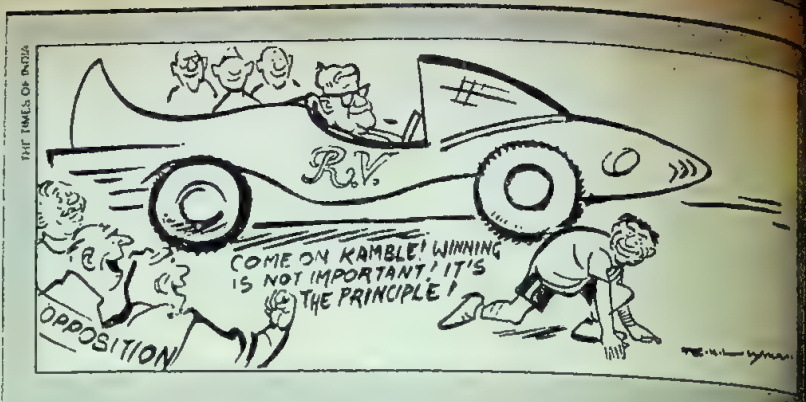
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• *If Mrs Gandhi continues to rule this country, it is not by virtue of her strength and by virtue of her virtues, but by the virtue of our sins.*

■ MADHU DANDAVATE *in The Sunday Observer*

• *The question facing us now is whether India will remain democratic. I have to convince the people here that Indira is not India.*

■ SYED MIR QASIM, *former Congressman in The London Observer*

• *I wish he (Farooq Abdullah) had enough sense to stay as the chief minister. I would have wished him to stay there because of my father... I would have liked the people to say that he is a worthy successor to his father...*

■ KHALEDA SHAH *in Current*

• *I am a he man and I will never follow silly astrology.*

■ N.T. RAMA RAO *in Weekend Review*

• *Those who do not write in English (in India) are mentioned only when they receive awards and promptly forgotten the next day. Since an award is nearly always a posthumous event, so far as real creativity is concerned, there is a funereal air about these ritual references.*

■ MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE *in The Indian Express*

• *There is in this eroded, modern world, an undeclared war on seriousness. Seriousness is not wanted...A serious person, persona non grata, is now worse than a bore: a misfit, he makes others uneasy.*

■ SISIRKUMAR GHOSE *in The Hindustan Times*

• *I am getting to know the real woman inside me. I'm becoming great friends with her. The Rekha everyone knows was getting on my nerves. I'd rather see myself as my mother's daughter, an innocent darling, almost a little angel.*

■ REKHA *in The Sunday Review*

• *She (Shabana Azmi) is a good actress. But I am the best. About that I have no doubt. I am certainly the best.*

■ SMITA PATIL *in The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *I don't even want to look at this man (Manmohan Desai)... His kind of cinema is ridiculous. It only stinks of lost and found formulae. My films carry messages.*

■ PRAKASH MEHRA *in Cine Blitz*

• *Politics in India today has indeed entered a lunar phase, a phase of shadows, of penumbrae, where everything is mixed up, where as in a moon-lit landscape the ugly look beautiful, where a criminal may appear to be a saint, where the nod of a fantastic monk can be taken as the supreme revolutionary directive.*

■ SUMANTA BANERJEE *in Economic and Political Weekly*

Dhoom macha de...rang jama de

















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COURTING PESTS



It's small, tough and very, very mean, a flighty creature that floats like a butterfly and stings, well, if not like a bee then like a mosquito, because that's what it is. Everything has been tried to destroy this frail fellow, including evil-smelling coils and electronic traps, but they haven't worked. Perhaps there's nothing to do but go to court.

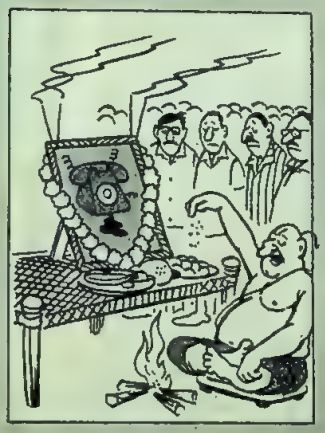
And that's exactly what a harassed gentleman did in Cochin. Last month, he walked into the high court, itching all over from the marks that the stinger had left on him during the battle the night before and demanded in a voice breaking with emotion and sleeplessness that the court direct the city authorities to do something about it. The court directed that a conference of various agencies be convened to solve the problem.

The city corporation, however, poured a dose of cold water on this enthusiasm when it declared in an affidavit that Cochin had no system of underground drainage, which is apparently the best way to get rid of mosquitoes. It finished with cruel satisfaction that "so long as the present system of open drainage continued, the mosquito problem would not be overcome."

DEADLY DISEASE

There was once a telecommunications minister who advised people to return their telephones if they did not work, which was just his subtle way of telling them to dump it. Telephone users in Calcutta came up with something equally subtle last month.

It began with a large number of invitation cards addressed to noted personalities of the city asking them to come to a *shraadh* ceremony in front of Telephone Bhavan. When the curious many made it to the spot, they saw a cot in the road, laid out with a garlanded photograph of a telephone, flowers, bowls of appetising fruit and all the other paraphernalia of worship. There was also a priest, complete with pot belly and sonorous voice, who did the honours without the trace of a grin on his swarthy countenance.



But there were grins all around as speaker after speaker offered condolences on the demise of a much-loved member of the family. When the speeches could be heard, they are understood to say that Calcutta Telephones had died of a disease called corruption. Even the thick-skinned technocrats manning the exchanges could not have failed to get the message.

FUTILE MEET

The heavens thwart man's best intentions although it is still not clear if they had anything to do with the incident in Surat last fortnight. The municipal health officer was in the middle of a press briefing and droned on about the way in which the city health department was tackling jaundice and other fatal diseases in the city. He was in the middle of a particularly exciting section about the virus armies being cut off at the pass when the drowsy silence was broken.



The reason was a cockroach. Now cockroaches are nothing very special, even at a health briefing, but this specimen was trying to crawl out of the wrapping of a sweet served to the press and which one reporter was about to eat.

The health officer turned several shades of pink and the mayor, until now sitting quietly in his corner, burst into a stream of orders to hide his confusion. He told the PRO to investigate the shop from where the snacks had been bought. Meanwhile the health officer continued with his briefing but it seemed to some present that the stuffing had been taken out of him.

ELEPHANT SENSE

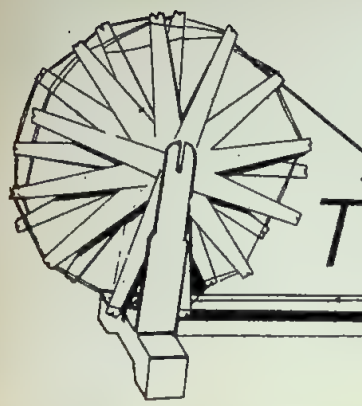
There are always ways of getting things done, if not through the usual chaotic channels then through methods which, if slightly orthodox, do have the merit of practicality.

Residents of a village near Shimoga town in Karnataka were getting fed up with the way that state transport buses gaily roared past without stopping. Repeated requests to start a halt at the village fell on deaf ears. The villagers decided on direct action.

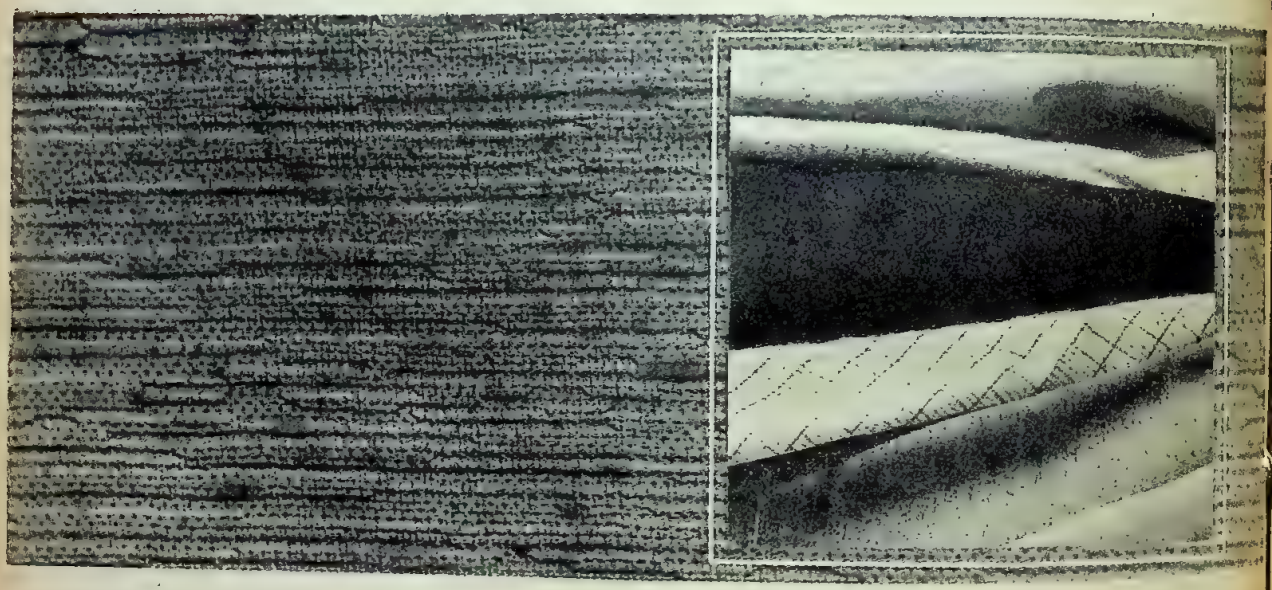
This took the form of an elephant which was hired, along with its mahout, for a day. Man and animal waited off the highway until the sound of a bus engine was heard some way off. Then the elephant lumbered out onto the road and just stood there like an immovable object. A bus is no irresistible force and the driver brought it to a wary halt some distance away. Soon a veritable convoy of stalled buses lined the highway, all the drivers trying not to meet the elephant's beady eye. The upshot was the drivers agreed to halt at the village, and the ponderous roadblock moved off.



–Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI



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Tiwari being garlanded by supporters: problems ahead

UTTAR PRADESH

Electoral Exercise



AS FAR as the ruling party is concerned, Lucknow clearly is the key to Mrs Gandhi's continued occupancy of 1 Safdarjung Road. Realising rather belatedly that its electoral citadel in Uttar Pradesh, which accounts for every sixth seat in the Lok Sabha, was crumbling at an alarming rate, the prime minister in a dramatic series of moves last fortnight sacked the state's lacklustre chief minister Sripat Misra and the equally uninspiring state Congress Committee chief Sukhdeo Singh. In their place the ruling party brought on its big guns in the form of union Commerce Minister Vishwanath Singh as the fifth UPCC(I) president since 1980 and heavyweight Narain Dutt Tiwari as the state's third Congress(I) chief minister in the same time.

There could have been no better indication of the ruling party's electoral desperation in Uttar Pradesh that both Tiwari and Singh were summoned back from Vienna where they were participants in the UNIDO conference and ordered to take up their new posts with immediate effect. Tiwari, after week-long consultations with Mrs Gandhi, was given a free hand to make a new cabinet and provide some badly-needed resuscitation to the floundering state of the party. Tiwari dropped three cabinet ministers and nine ministers of state.

Shortly after their installation, both Tiwari and Singh spoke optimistically about the difference their new appointments would make to the party's chances in the coming poll. "My first priority is to deliver the goods to the 11 crore people in the state. Everyone knows that I am a development man. My government will ensure that the minimum needs of the people are met," announced Tiwari. Singh was slightly more circumspect. "As a loyal soldier to the Congress(I), I will carry out the mandate given to me by my leader to the best of my ability", he said.

Both men, despite their separate and considerable political clout in the state, face a rocky road ahead. Tiwari, like Hercules, will have to first clean the messy Augean Stables that has been bequeathed to him by Misra. In his 26 undistinguished months in office, not only did the state administration go to seed, the ruling party fell into a deep slumber leaving the field open to the Opposition to consolidate itself. The Opposition's gains were reflected in recent electoral gains with them having snatched three assembly seats from the Congress (I) since December last year.

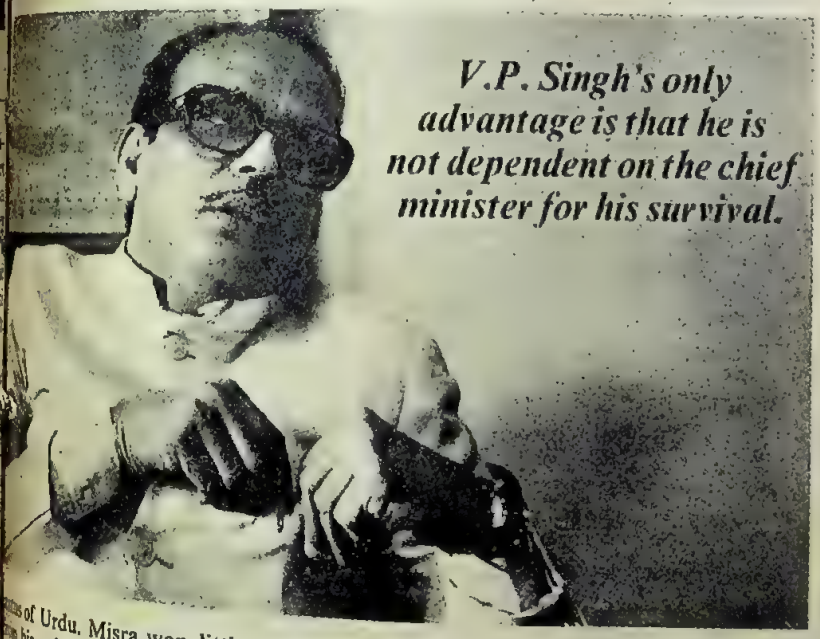
Tiwari, not surprisingly, flew into flak almost immediately when he faced his first major crisis in the choice of his cabinet colleagues. Of the first eight days in office, he spent five in New Delhi waiting for Mrs Gandhi and the strategy council consisting of Rajiv Gandhi, Kamlapathi Tripathi and Arun Nehru, to clear his cabinet appointees. Meanwhile, Tiwari's Krishna Menon Road bungalow was swamped by 35 ex-ministers and over 200 state MLAs jockeying for a ministerial berth. The final clearance came from Mrs Gandhi over the wireless from Himachal Pradesh where she was on tour.

But it was clearly no easy task for the High Command. Even after two days in Delhi, Tiwari was given permission to include just three cabinet ministers, including Veer Bahadur Singh and Brahm Dutt who had both been on the earlier Misra cabinet. It was not till almost a week after his appointment that Tiwari expanded his three-member cabinet to include 48, including 18 cabinet ministers, 26 ministers of state and four deputy ministers. Explained Tiwari: "It was not as easy as people think. Many problems are linked with cabinet expansion and the prime minister had to consult all the concerned people before finalising the list." The main unspoken problem was of course the inevitable caste factor that also played part in Singh's appointment. With a Brahmin replacing another Brahmin as chief minister, Mrs Gandhi's choice as party chief had to be either a Muslim, a Thakur or from the Scheduled Caste. Singh was picked since he is one of the few leaders who fulfilled the two basic requirements apart from the caste factor—a large measure of integrity, a tough following and a record of integrity.

In fact, the total restructuring of the party set-up in Uttar Pradesh has be

lagging fire since December, 1983, when the party was badly mauled in the by-elections to the Lok Sabha and the state assembly. The delay was mainly due to Mrs Gandhi's preoccupation with the Punjab crisis. The crunch came last May when the party lost two crucial assembly by-elections to the Lok Dal and Maneka Gandhi's Rashtriya Sanjay Manch. Since then, numerous candidates including Minister of State for Rural Reconstruction Mohsina Kidwai and former Union minister K.C.Pant have been considered for the job of chief minister.

What irked the Centre was Misra's total inability to prevent inter-ministerial feuds and factionalism. At Malihabad, two senior cabinet ministers ganged up against the minister in charge of the campaign. Two other ministers crossed swords publicly in the assembly on the issue of Urdu. Misra won little respect from his colleagues with his practice of scrutinising the files of his cabinet colleagues. Nor did he endear himself with central ministers with his cavalier attitude towards them when they visited Lucknow. Pranab Mukherjee found himself travelling by hired taxi to Kashinath June even though his travel plans were routed through Misra's office. On the economic front, Misra hardly did better. During his stewardship, losses in 17 state owned enterprises rose to Rs 207 crore from a third of that and the state's budgetary gap rose five times to Rs 207 crore. Irrigation and sales tax arrears almost doubled.



V.P. Singh's only advantage is that he is not dependent on the chief minister for his survival.

In Lucknow's labyrinthine Congress(I) power centres, there is certainly some jubilation at the appointments of Tiwari and Singh. Says Satish Ajmani, the state's Youth Congress Committee general secretary: "Fortunately for us, we now have a powerful team of Tiwariji and Raja Saheb (as Singh is called) who present an excellent combination of experience, dynamism and honesty. Adds Swarup Kumar Bakshi, the newly-appointed UPCC(I) general secretary: "Things will start looking up now. Both the party and the Government will be able to work in unison and both will gain immensely. "But that could be wishful thinking. For one, Tiwari is well known in the state. Said the leader of the Opposition in the assembly, Rajinder Singh: "Nothing is expected to change, they can't take people for granted by changing chief ministers. For another, the composition of the new cabinet could hamper their efforts to revitalise the party. Tiwari has inherited 32 members of Misra's ministry. Of the 18 cabinet ministers, only five—Narinder Singh, Subhdeo Prashad, Veer Sen, Saidul Hasan and Azizur Rehman—are new faces and two are MP's because men with clean records are hard to find. One major discrepancy in the appointments that could prove crucial is the fact that there is no young blood in the new hierarchy. There is an obvious attempt to win back the Muslim vote by the appointment of three cabinet rank Muslims, a first for the state.

But the most revealing feature of the new cabinet is that Tiwari has retained control of most of the important portfolios. But if the idea was to clip the wings of the ministers who wield clout, he has hardly succeeded. He failed in his attempts to change the portfolios of eight former ministers, prominent among them being Industry and Irrigation Minister Veer Bahadur Singh, Finance and Energy Minister Brahm Dutt, Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi, Excise Minister Vasudev Singh, and Sugarcane Minister Surinder Pal Singh. Veer Bahadur Singh, a prominent eastern Uttar Pradesh Thakur leader, is close to Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Nehru, Tripathi draws strength from his father Kamlapathi Tripathi and both Vasudev Singh and Surendra Pal Singh wield clout within the Thakur and Jat communities respectively.

But Tiwari's main hurdle could be his own reputation. During his earlier stint as chief minister during the Emergency, he had earned the derisive sobriquet of "New Delhi" Tiwari and also "Nothing Doing" Tiwari for his habit of visiting New Delhi at every opportunity and not taking any decisions without first consulting Mrs Gandhi or Sanjay Gandhi. Though largely non-controversial, Tiwari was not able to carry the state party with him and many Congress(I) members still believe that it was his over-enthusiasm for the family planning programme that the party was wiped out electorally in the state in 1977. Even now, he is strongly dependant on the Central leadership for his political survival.

BUT TIWARI's immediate problems are the growing dissidence within the legislative party, mounting state deficit, an unresponsive bureaucracy and stalled development plans. Also with over 150 party MLA's having criminal records, Tiwari will have to walk a delicate line in deciding whether to give the police the green signal to take appropriate action. Tiwari, however, oozes confidence. "I will involve each area, region and community in running the affairs of the state. It will no longer be an administration from the top. I will make it a participative administration." But the fact that the state has been growing increasingly unmanageable—it has had eight chief ministers in nine years—means that whatever his plans, he faces an uphill task.

Tiwari's success, or failure, will ultimately depend on how tight a rein the party is kept on, a task that is entirely the unenviable responsibility of V.P.Singh. In the absence of a properly constituted PCC(I), Singh now has to find at least 57 new DCC(I) presidents to carry the party's flag during the coming elections. But with elections only four months away, Singh has very little time at his disposal. His only advantage is that with his appointment, Uttar Pradesh is now the only Congress(I)

state where the PCC(I) chief is not dependent on the chief minister for his survival. But he still faces the problem of having to select 85 suitable candidates who can ensure victory for the party in the polls.

That task will be all the more daunting with the coming together of all the major opposition parties in the state. While the communists and the Janata pose no great threat, it is the powerful combination of the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch, Lok Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party that cannot but cause concern. But for the ruling party, the only consolation is that the Tiwari-Singh combination is far more potent electorally than Misra could ever hope to be. Uttar Pradesh, in spite of its political preponderance, has had eight chief ministers in nine years, a reflection of its unmanageable political dimension. The task before Tiwari and Singh is indeed a daunting one.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Lucknow

MAHARASHTRA

Tampered File



JUST as interest in the long-drawn Antulay case seemed to flag, a sensational new twist came last fortnight when the prosecution accused the defence of tampering with A.R. Antulay's endorsements on cement appplications. The defence was quick in accusing the Maharashtra Government of foul play and of distorting records to suit the "designs of the prosecution".

In an affidavit filed last week, Additional Chief Secretary K.V. Halve stated that if the files were in a mangled condition it was because the papers had been received in that state from the government pleader's office. (The government pleader was Sheroo Kanuga, honorary adviser to the Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishthan). More startling was the revelation from the Government that on November 20 1981, Antulay had retained certain papers from the cement files which had been produced in Justice B. Lentin's court and no inventory had been kept of these papers.

With charges and countercharges of missing and added documents, an angry Justice S.N. Khatri suspended the open court hearing and ordered a detailed investigation. Prosecution counsel S.B. Jaisinghani announced he was moving for cancellation of bail bonds for Antulay on the grounds that he was tampering with evidence. The application can prove to be Antulay's trickiest legal battle and is bound to go to the Supreme Court.

The drama of the file fiddles started on August 2 when lawyers of both the sides were examining the 33 files which dealt with cement allocations. While the files were being leafed through Antulay suddenly flourished at complainant Ramdas Nayak one of his endorsements remarking that it would completely demolish the prosecution case. What he showed was a recommendation by himself dated August 14, 1981, on a cement application. It stated: "This an initial reaction. It is for the department to check and no need to inform of the outcome." Nayak and counsel Mahesh Jethmalani were taken aback since the endorsement was rather different from that produced in Justic Lentin's court in an earlier case. The files had only arbitrary and curt remarks like "Please allot", on occasions even mentioning the factory from where the cement was to be lifted. Nine other similar lengthy endorsements were pointed out in an effort to prove that Antulay was giving no orders to the Food and Civil (F & C) supplies file paper department; he was merely recommending. The only difference this time was that the writing was not on the file. Although the sheets had holes, they were not tied to the lace in the files.

A sample of Antulay's endorsement is found on an application for cement from Cosmic Radio obviously forwarded by Rajiv Gandhi's associate Vijay Dhar, dated March 6, 1981. The note reads: "Vijay Dhar is not the sort of person going about writing notes for all. He is choosy in matters of genuineness and honesty and I will want the F & C department to use own judgement and not allow anyone, including me, to substitute for its own findings. Prima facie, I would recommend please allot. What the result is for never mind, for or against. Please put up a nicely worded respectful reply to Vijay Dhar."

D.V. Ekbote, superintendent of the F & C supplies department, however, doubts that these nine endorsements on loose sheets of paper found in files 6, 7 and 13 were at all there when he presented the files to the court on August 1. He produced xerox copies of the files which do not contain these Antulay endorsements. Ekbote is willing to concede only the endorsement dated August 14, 1981, on the back of a sheet in file 28. On this Halve has observed in his affidavit that "the endorsement did not exist when the matter of allocation was dealt with by the department". This implies that it was added later, presumably some time after Lentin's case and before being returned



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

to the F & C department.

During the inspection, Antulay pointed that the files had all been separated with the noting section and the correspondence section split and put into separate files without the customary 'separator'. He charged: "There is a deliberate attempt to handicap my defence by disturbing the original files and distorting the record so completely as to suit the designs of the prosecution. It appears to be a con-

CRIME

Cop Out

IN contrast to the publicity, fanfare with which they were arrested, the Maharashtra Government was tight-lipped about the release last month, of top smugglers Haji Mastan, detained under the National Security Act (NSA) for involvement in the May communal riots Bombay. The 18 smugglers and employees of the All India Peoples' Secretariat were quietly released on the day of the Maharashtra Assembly session without any announcement. The decision to lift the detention taken by Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and the state Home Minister came as a shock to Chief Secretary R.D. Pradhan, who had been kept in the dark.

The release of Mastan, Karim Lala and others was undoubtedly embarrassing for Bombay's fortiss Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro who, at the time of their arrest days earlier, had stated emp-

"There is a deliberate attempt to handicap my defence by disturbing the original files and distorting the record so completely as to suit the designs of the prosecution."

—A.R. ANTULAY

...ious effort motivated by certain political ...ersons at the helm of the Government in ...der to suppress some of the important ...ivities of the then chief minister."

Antulay's advocates justify this by ...inting out that additions and subtrac...ons do not tally with the indexes of ori...nal files. For example, in file 15, there are ...extra pages, in file 18 there are 394 ...ges missing, in file 24 the missing pages ...mber 40. Mahesh Jethmalani insists: "This is an orchestrated song and dance. They very well knew the state of the files since Justice Lentin's time. The sanctity of the files was violated by the government pleader who defended Antulay and presumably acted under his instructions."

Halve in his affidavit has presented a detailed account of how the files came to be separated and how extensively they travelled during the last two-and-a-half years. Some of the files were sent to the Maharashtra Metropolitan Council in November 1981 since following a debate on Antulay's trusts he had offered to make all relevant files available to the members. The files from the F & C department were handed to the chairman of the Legislative Council R.S. Gavai on November 21, 1981. Shortly thereafter, however, they were also required in Justice Lentin's court for the case filed by Mrinal Gore and P.B. Samant.

To make certain cement applications available to the court, the Government had to separate the cement files delinking the noting section from the correspondence section and giving a receipt to Gavai. When the Government pleader's office redelivered the files to the secretariat it was discovered that the papers were loose and bundles mixed up. They could not be related to the original files and the noting sections available in the secretariat. Playing it safe the department got all the papers xeroxed and then returned them to the Government pleader's office with a request to submit the papers with a detailed index. The documents along with the indexes were formally received by the F & C supplies department only on May 11, 1984.

The noting sections of the files were entirely with the Legislative Council till April 1982 when the governor asked the chief minister for material in regard to Nayak's application seeking permission to prosecute Antulay. Then several papers moved from Gavai to the governor. They were returned to the additional chief secretary in September 1982. An additional compilation is that of November 20, 1982. Antulay had clarified to Gavai that he had retained some papers which were once produced in court and which might be required again. The Government does not known which papers were retained.

The prosecution notes that most of these notings 'recommending' and not ordering did not relate to the period between January and September 1981 when the cement allocation was alleged to have been made. This being so, it should take quite a while to untangle the riddle of the file fiddles.

—COOMI KAPOOR



"We are merely the detaining authority. The release can only be made by the Government."

JULIO RIBEIRO Police Chief



Haji Mastan



Karim Lala

...We have clear evidence to link the ...sted men with some of the distur...ces in central Bombay. Arms and ...molow cocktails were passed on to the ...ers through the Secretariat."

Curiously, none of the 18 had bo...ered to make a formal application to ... police challenging their detention. ...ases never got as far as being placed ...re the advisory committee for NSA ...ections. Says Ribeiro: "We are mere... the detaining authority. The release ...n only be made by the Government ...re considering all aspects."

Shortly after his release Mastan ...ended his Secretariat which was ...ed originally to provide medical ...stance to the poor. His two am...ances have been handed over to other welfare organisations. According to a newspaper, Mastan had announced his intention to start his own political party from mid-August.

Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray voiced the general opinion of Bombayites about the releases when he observed: "A sumptuous sum of crores of rupees must have gone to somebody's election fund. These smugglers first became apartment builders and now apparently they are nation builders." Thackeray has not much to complain about either. Not only has his district chief Madhukar Sarpotdar been released, but also his 18 Shakha pramukhs. Out of the 75 shiv sainiks arrested under NSA, around 50 have been released and even the few remaining are to be freed shortly. The police case against Thackeray under section 153 (A) IPC for his April speech in Chowpatty inciting hatred between communities is proceeding at snail's pace. Although registered on May 27, it was forwarded to the Government only last fortnight. The cases against the editor of *Akhbar-e-Alam* and the Congress(I) MLA A.R. Khan are equally far from any kind of definite action.

With most of the NSA arrests lifted and no judicial inquiry ordered the authorities have clearly not been able to bring to book those responsible for the riots that killed 98 in Bombay alone and 296 in the region between Bombay and Bhiwandi. Loss to property was estimated at Rs 7.66 crore.

Says Rafiq Zakaria, former Congress(I) deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha: "In the past, judicial inquiries after a communal riot were a rule. Now, even these are denied. Perhaps the powers that be realised that the probe will only confirm all the popular misgivings. Never in my life have I come across such a callous attitude towards the rehabilitation of victims of a communal riot."

—COOMI KAPOOR

MADRAS

An Explosive Blunder

TWO weeks after the event, the reverberations from the August 2 bomb blast that demolished the arrival lounge of Madras' Meenambakkam airport killing 29 people,including 24 Sri Lankans, and injuring 38 others are still being heard. The fact that the bomb was obviously meant to explode on an Air Lanka flight bound for Colombo points the finger at Tamil extremists based in Tamil Nadu, something the Indian Government would naturally find embarrassing. But as the two separate investigations into the cold-blooded affair entered a crucial stage last week, the sequence of events that led to the explosion at the airport suggested that more embarrassments than were originally foreseen would be forthcoming soon.

The tragic events that led to the actual blast were in themselves a shocking mix of official bungling and apathy as the reconstructed details of that fateful day clearly showed:

5.35 p.m. Indian Airlines flight IC 574 from Colombo lands at Madras. Thirty-one Sri Lankans on board scheduled to catch a connecting Air-India flight at 5 a.m. the next morning are put in the arrival lounge.

9.50 p.m. Laila Singh, airport manager, receives an anonymous telephone call claiming that "two dark brown suitcases lying with the customs contain bombs." On being asked what kind of bombs, the caller replies "rock-blasting material. Don't ask any more questions."

9.55 p.m. Singh telephones J.C.Tamhane, deputy director, operations, and informs him about the call. He also calls the fire station and asks for a tender and an ambulance to be kept near the airport terminus.

10 p.m. Singh rings up Shivaprasad, deputy chief controller of explosives. Shivaprasad refuses to come unless he is sent transport as he lives 14 km away. After a minute argument, Singh gets authorisation to send a jeep.

10.15 p.m. Singh contacts K.Kasim, deputy commissioner of police in charge of airport security. Kasim merely thanks Singh and puts the phone down. Singh also calls Kalimullah Khan, deputy superintendent of police. Khan says,"What should I do? Why don't you inform the inspectors at the airport?" Singh tries the airport police number but gets no response.

10.20 p.m. Singh walks across to the Indian Airlines control room and informs duty officer Pattabhi about the call. Pattabhi confirms that there are two brown suitcases lying with the customs. Singh then goes to the customs area and tells customs officers R.Damodaran and Augustine Thomas about the bomb call. They laugh it off as a hoax and tell him the suitcases probably contain contraband. Singh tells them not to touch the suitcases till the explosives experts arrive.

10.30 p.m. Singh returns to his office.

10.40p.m. The anonymous caller telephones again with the terse message that "the bombs in the suitcase are going to explode by 11 p.m." Singh frantically calls airport security police but again gets no answer. He also tries to contact the announcer on the public address system to broadcast a warning to passengers and others but again gets no answer.

10.44 p.m. Singh rushes out into the arrival hall in search of police personnel. He finds a group eating their dinner and tells them to warn passengers to evacuate the area. They reluctantly agree and start waking the transit passengers from Sri Lanka in the arrival lounge. Desperate to sound the alarm Singh rushes to the public address room to broadcast a warning but finds the door locked.

10.49 p.m. Singh rushes to the customs area and informs Damodaran and Thomas about the second call. They ask Alexander, a baggage loader, to wheel the two suitcases out onto the airport tarmac. Singh then shouts at the passengers to get out of the building.

10.52 p.m. The bombs in the suitcases explode. Damodaran, Thomas, Alexander and 29 other people in the lounge are killed instantly.

12.10 p.m. The explosives experts arrive, two hours and ten minutes after they have been informed.

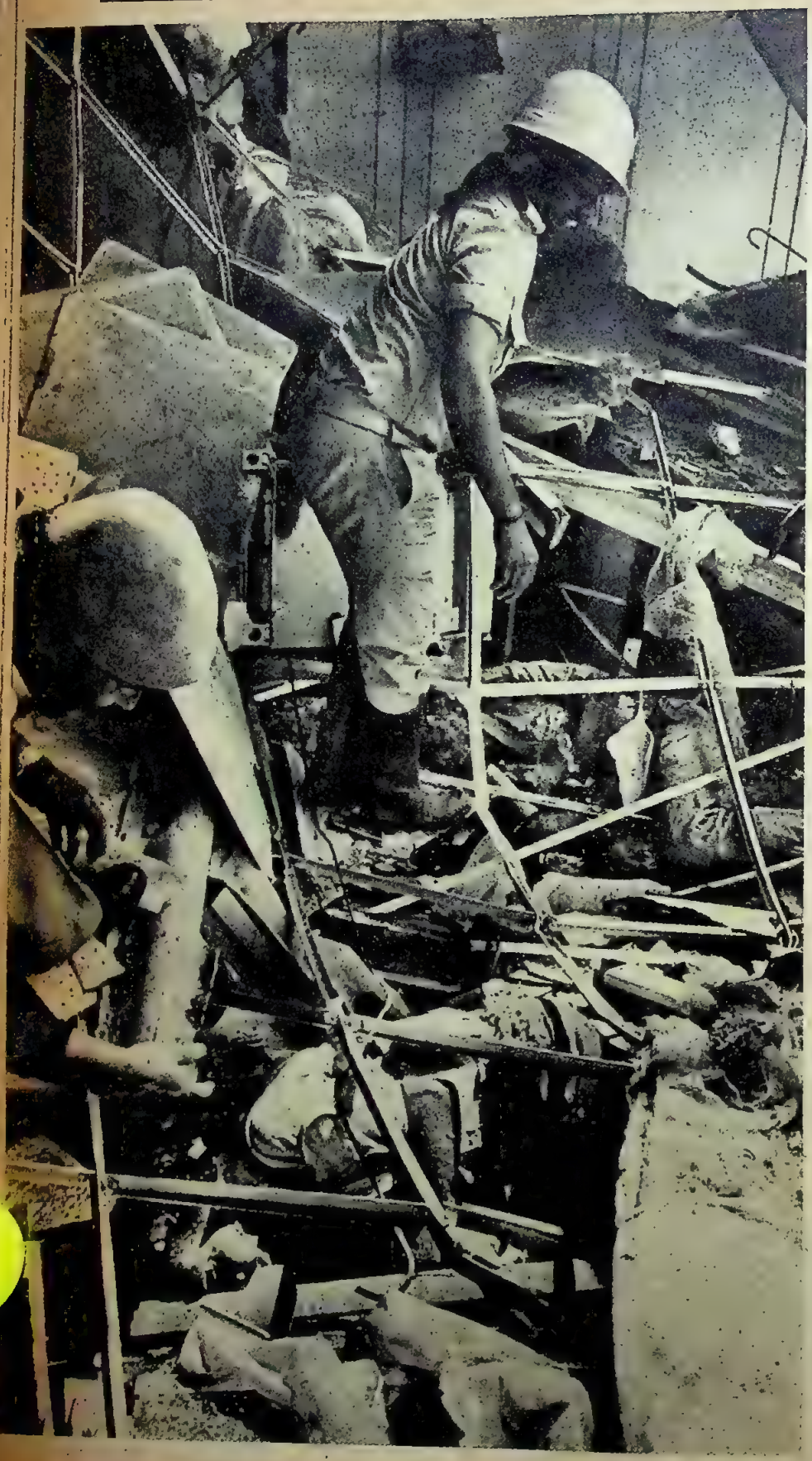
The effect of the blast was devastating. Debris from the shattered building covered the bodies and the final death count came only three days later. The airport itself was shut down to international



Photographs by RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Remains of the arrival hall where transit passengers were sleeping





Police extricating bodies from the wreckage: a cold-blooded affair

traffic for three days while police and Ho... me Guards personnel worked round the clock to clear the rubble.The incident ... off a spate of bomb scares in other airports and a general red alert was issued to all air... ports in the country. All air cargo is being put in cold storage for a 24-hour period.

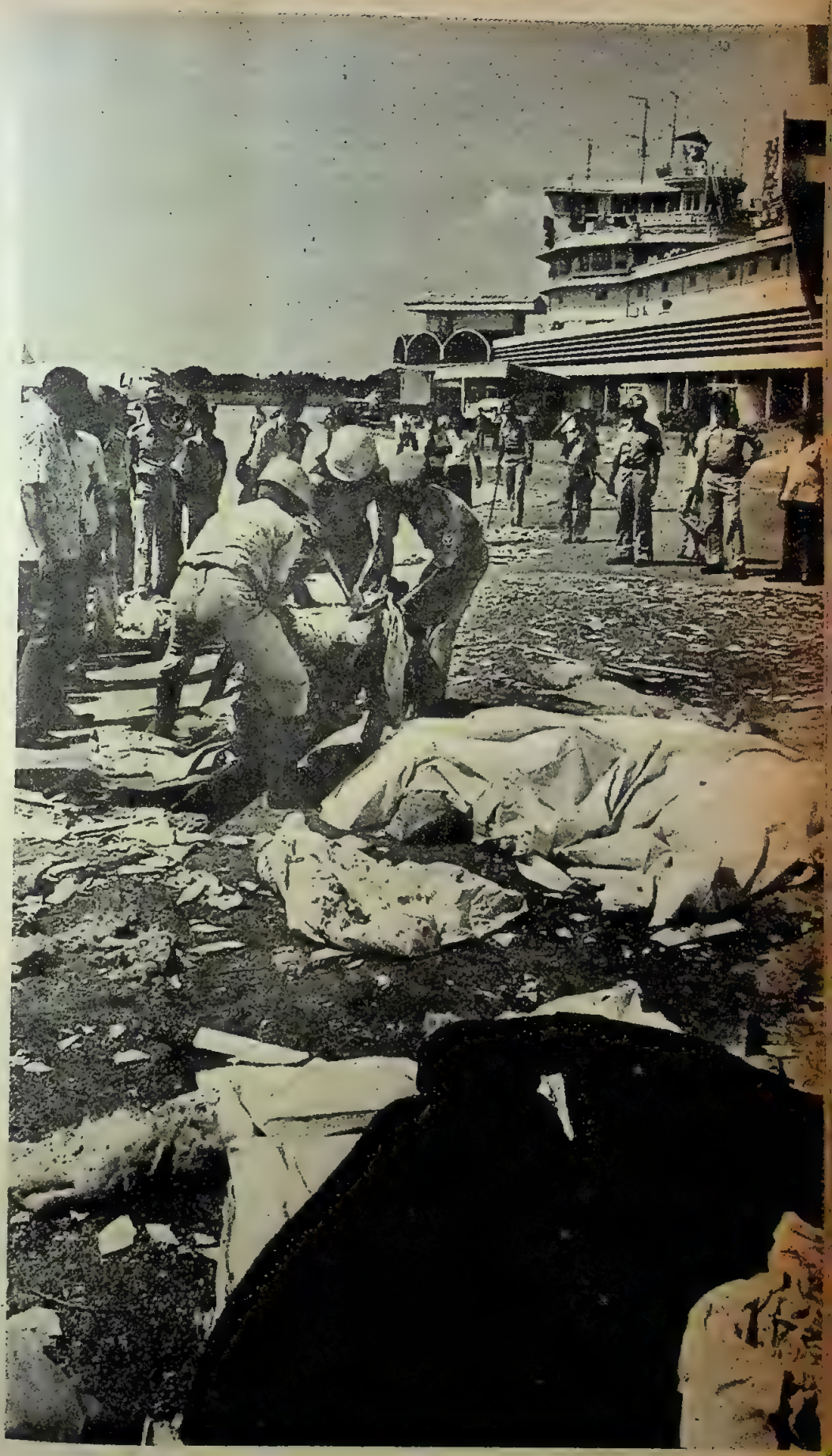
Meanwhile, Khursheed Alam Khan, Union civil aviation minister who came to Madras the day after the blast appointed an inquiry commission headed by Air Vice-Marshal C.K.S.Raje, director-general of civil aviation. The Tamil Nadu Government set up its own commission led by K.Mohandas, director-general of police.

But last week, the Mohandas team arrested five people including two Sri Lanka Tamils. The main suspect so far is a man listed on the passenger manifest as Kathiresan Marimuthu who had checked in the two suitcases for an Air Lanka flight to Colombo that same evening. The name is obviously fictitious since the address given on his passport turned out to be an unoccupied house in Tambaram, a Madras suburb.But investigations have proved that Kathiresan purchased the Air Lanka ticket(No:4100 304 143) from the Madras branch of Stic Travels and Tours on July 30. Kathiresan wanted to fly to Colombo on July 31 but was told he was 24th on the waiting-list. Later he decided against travelling when he was told his two suitcases were overweight and he would have to pay excess baggage fees.

HE WAS back again on August 1 with a confirmed ticket for Air Lanka's Boeing 737 flight UL 122 to Colombo scheduled to leave Madras at 8.10 p.m. This time he paid the excess baggage fees. Airline officials recall that his booking was for Madras-Colombo and that his suitcases were accordingly tagged.

However, Kathiresan obviously had no intention of catching the flight as he failed to appear for the immigration and customs checks. It was also evident in retrospect that he had an accomplice working at the airport since a London tag was affixed to one of his suitcases and a Paris tag onto the other.The tags would have ensured that the suitcases were automatically loaded onto Air Lanka's London and Paris flights from Colombo. The London flight was due to leave Colombo at 11.55 p.m. while the Paris flight was scheduled for departure at 11.30 p.m. In any event, the setting of the time bomb indicated that it would have exploded

Bodies being carried out from the departure hall: fatal blow



Colombo airport at 10.52.

Kathiresan evidently expected his accomplice to get his bags through customs and onto the aircraft since customs officials usually check only 5 per cent of the luggage. As it happened, a customs officer got suspicious because of the weight and detained it for checking in the passengers' presence. Seeing the London and Paris tags, the customs authorities, realising it was unclaimed, presumed the passenger had boarded the aircraft. They carried the suitcase inside the aircraft and held them up for identification. Since nobody claimed them a head count was taken and it was found that one passenger was missing. A check of the manifest revealed it to be Kathiresan. The flight took off and the two suitcases were taken to the customs detention area near the arrival lounge. Customs laws require two witnesses to be present when a bag is checked for contraband. Since there were none available, the officials decided to open it later.

It is now certain that Kathiresan was the man who made the phone calls to Singh after he realised that his bags were not on the flight. It is also believed that he made the calls from the airport itself. Meanwhile, police investigators have put together an identikit picture of Kathiresan from descriptions obtained from the travel agent and airline officials. One person has been arrested on suspicion and Shivaprasad, the explosives expert, has been suspended. By last week, all indications pointed to Kathiresan being a member of one of the Tamil extremist groups sheltering in Tamil Nadu who intended to blow up Colombo airport.

Sri Lankan intelligence officials suspect two groups in particular. A small individualistic group called the Tamil Eelam Army headed by Tambipillai Maheshwar who escaped from Pannaiya Jail in Sri Lanka some years ago and who has allegedly been involved in several bank robberies there since. The other group suspected is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam who blew up an Air Lanka aircraft at an airport in Sri Lanka in 1984. But that, if true, would place the Indian and Tamil Nadu Governments in a tricky position. Says Tamil Nadu Home Secretary, T.V. Venkataraman "We are keeping an open mind on the matter." But just how open will only be known when the investigations are completed.

— RAJ CHENGAPPA with RAGHAVENDRA RAO in Madras



JAMMU & KASHMIR

Tricky Sur



IT WAS not an easy victory for Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Gulam Mohammed Shah. Last fortnight when he secured a vote of confidence in the Assembly, it sparked off pitched battles among MLA's inside the house and bloody confrontation between the police and anti-Shah protesters outside in which 10 people were killed and 200 wounded. Not only was curfew clamped on the entire city, the police detained three MLA's including Panther's party chief Bhim Singh and People's Party Chairman Abdul Ghani Lore under the Public Safety Act. Though Shah won the battle, it was not without the administrative backing of the Central Government. Even after six weeks, the Kashmiris were not sure about Shah's continuation in office for the Assembly's remaining four-year term, since even for conducting the Assembly's business he was hopelessly dependent on the Congress(I)'s manipulative politics and Governor Jagmohan.

Inside the Assembly, anti-Shah speaker Wali Mohammad Itoo was bodily lifted from his chair by Congress(I) MLA's after being voted out and replaced by Mangat Ram Sharma, a J&K Pradesh Congress Committee(I) general secretary. Said a jubilant Shah after the Assembly meeting: "We were directed by the governor to prove our majority on the floor of the house within one month. When it was known that we had majority support, all sorts of illegal and undemocratic hurdles were put in our way. We meant business this time and we have certainly done it."

Though Shah won the battle he is hopelessly dependent on the Congress(I) and Governor Jagmohan for even conducting the Assembly's business.

With the solid support of 43 MLA's (including 26 from the Congress-I), Shah's victory was never in doubt. But Itoo's move expelling 13 MLA's from the Assembly a day earlier and declaring their seats vacant upset Shah's strategy. Itoo offered no explanation for his act, but maintained that his order was perfectly legal and constitutional. Said he: "We have only one National Conference headed by Dr Farooq Abdullah as a recognised party in the state. Since these MLA's had left this party I am convinced that they had defected." Itoo's fiat came after Acting Chief Justice A.S. Anand of the state high court gave his verdict saying that the 12 MLA's did not attract any disqualification.



Despite the high court's judgement, Itoo stuck to his guns, forcing Shah and the Congress(I) to opt for an all-out offensive against Farooq and his supporters. Fearing a constitutional crisis, Shah paraded all the 43 MLA's in front of Governor Jagmohan 12 hours before the Assembly began and requested him to ensure that it would be peaceful. Jagmohan sent his secretary as his observer for the crucial session and instructed state officials to take appropriate action.

Predictably, when the Assembly session began the next morning, Ali Mohammed Naik, state education minister and leader of the House, sought approval for Itoo's removal as speaker. While Itoo was facing the Congress(I) attack his own staff had betrayed him: Assembly Secretary Abdul Rashid had earlier challenged Itoo's expulsion order and the subordinate staff did not provide the customary hammer required for the speaker to conduct the Assembly meeting. When Itoo persisted with his order that he would not allow the defectors to participate in the deliberations, Naik himself moved a no-confidence motion against Itoo and declared it passed.



Shah leaving the Assembly

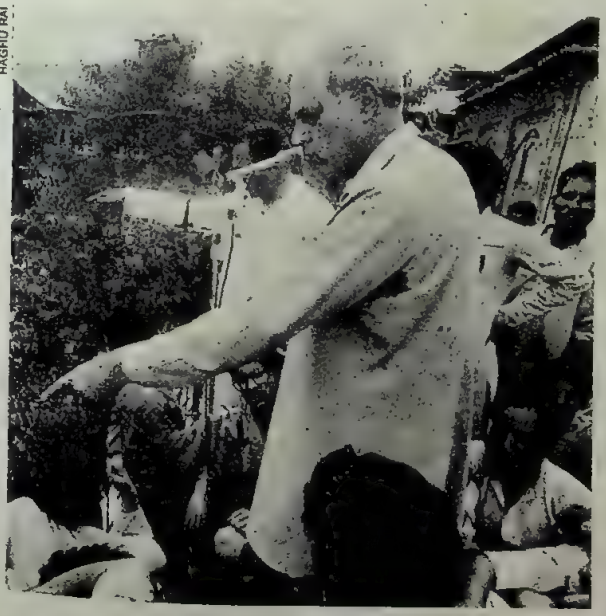
ckysurvival

Itoo was then removed from the chair physically.

Once Itoo and 32 other Farooq-led National Conference MLA's withdrew from the House, Shah and other members of the National Conference who were sitting together in the treasury benches adopted a motion of confidence in Shah's Government, elected another speaker and a deputy speaker and praised Shah as one of the strongest administrators the state had. The ruling party had done its homework properly. Soon after his election, new speaker Sharma issued his first order, rescinding his predecessor's action expelling the 13 MLA's.

Said Khalida Shah, chief of the parallel National Conference, after the meeting: "We had given a long rope because we wanted the Assembly session to be over peacefully. But they seem determined to create crises in the state. In this situation we can't sit back and watch it helplessly." Retorted Farooq: "Is it democracy? What has happened in the House is a murder of democracy. They got commandos inside the House to bodily lift the speaker. Will Mrs Gandhi run the country this way."

Farooq was finding it difficult to sustain his street protests in the valley. Even his senior colleagues were showing signs of fatigue and helplessness.



RAGHU RAI

But Congress(I) legislators cited a similar episode which took place in 1979 when Mohi-u-din Malik was removed by Sheikh Abdullah as speaker after he defected to the Congress(I). Parmanand, a National Conference MLA, was elected as speaker. Asserted Janak Raj Gupta, secretary of the state Congress(I) legislature party: "Why does Farooq conveniently forget that Sheikh Saheb during his regime provided a certain code of conduct? What had happened then is being repeated now. If that was correct, this is also correct."

Even now Itoo is likely to move the Supreme Court and challenge his removal as speaker. And Farooq is determined to continue his fight against his removal both inside and outside the state. Said the former chief minister: "I will take this fight to each state and city and will not rest till we are able to remove Mrs Gandhi from the Centre."

Though Farooq has no definite plans, he is banking on his mass popularity in the valley and on the Opposition's support outside. Farooq was finding it difficult to sustain his street protests in the valley, due to his weak grassroots-level organisation. Even his senior colleagues were showing signs of fatigue and helplessness. For example, last month when Farooq announced that the Martyrs Memorial processions would begin at 9 a.m. from party headquarters, all the senior leaders arrived two hours late. Even on the day when Itoo was removed, his party's office could not provide the copies of the memorandum submitted to Jagmohan.

Despite dwindling support within his own party Farooq did keep his National Conference's flag flying in the valley, and his supporters fought police who tried to present a rosy picture of the law and order situation. As a result three people died on the spot and six succumbed to injuries later. Said Farooq angrily: "If they want to impose military rule then let an army general take over the administration of the state and start killing people." Similar echoes were raised in New Delhi when National Conference (Farooq) members of Parliament staged an angry walk-out.

But Shah's problems have not ended with his victory in the Assembly. During the last six weeks he has not been able to erase the

popular belief that he is just a pawn in the Congress(I)'s hands and has been imposed on the state with the active connivance of the Centre. In fact, Shah has survived so far with the Centre's support, which was evident even during the secret parleys between senior officials of the Prime Minister's Secretariat and Governor Jagmohan. Shah and his cabinet colleagues were rushing to Jagmohan almost twice a day for consultations. Admitted a senior cabinet minister: "But for Jagmohan's active involvement and advice we would not have been able to face the people in the state."

For the Congress(I) also, it is politically expedient to keep Shah in office. It is through him that it can eliminate anti-Congress(I) elements from the bureaucracy and keep Farooq Abdullah on a tight leash. Shah's Government was under pressure from Congress(I) and some prominent cabinet members to order a complete overhaul of the bureaucracy. In fact, Congress(I) leaders complained to the central leadership that Shah was shielding and patronising those officials who had played an important role in formulating anti-Congress(I) policies in the state and gave a list of 40 senior IAS and other officials that they wanted to be moved out of sensitive departments. In addition, Shah was requested to sack all the nine deputy commissioners and superintendents of police who they accused of loyalty to Farooq.

But instead of conceding their request, the Shah Government released half a dozen pro-Centre IAS officials for deputation to the Central Government. Soon after taking over Shah had promised that the state Government would bring out a white paper covering nine different issues including creation of senior posts and promotion of police officials by Farooq's government. But later on, under pressure from some senior bureaucrats, officials scrutinising files were instructed to ignore promotions in the police department and the creation of additional posts.

Interestingly, neither the Congress(I) MLA's nor any of the members of Shah's cabinet spoke about the future development of the state or how to avert the decline in tourist arrivals, which touched its nadir last month. Khalida, however, was visibly concerned about it. Said she: "We must concentrate now on the welfare programmes. This political fight will continue as long as democracy survives in this country but the people will not wait. The question in J & K is: will Shah be able to provide stability to the state?

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

CONGRESS(I)

Leaky Return

AS THE drum beat of impending elections grows louder, the expected sound of new arrivals at the ruling party's doorstep has a touch of the fairy-tale. But the handsome prince, last fortnight, seemed to have missed his cue for the witching hour by moments. As Dr Karan Singh (former maharaja of Kashmir and cabinet minister, born-again Hindu leader and independent MP from Udhampur) made his first move to step into the Congress(I) fold, the Fairy Queen it seemed, was not at home. Singh blames the unchecked leak on an overzealous correspondent in Srinagar who "overheard me talking about it to people", and published it before he could meet Mrs Gandhi.

As there was little he could do about it, Singh decided to take the plunge nobly, having retained a ruefully low political profile since his resignation from the Congress(S) in September 1980, seven months after being elected on their ticket.

The only time he hit the news after that was last year, following the discovery of the fabulous jewellery hoard in Srinagar (INDIA TODAY, November 15, 1983). He issued a writ in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court claiming the jewels to be his rightful ancestral property and recently asked the court to appoint a receiver in the case. The court turned down his request but ordered the six boxes containing the treasure to be "resealed" in the presence of one of his representatives. Certain newspaper reports misspelt "resealed" as "released"—and word quickly went around that the princely MP's return to the court of Safdarjung Road had no doubt been prompted by a division of the spoils. No such luck, alas. While he awaits the decision for a share of the glittering treasure, his situation is made all the more affecting by his unrequited protestations of gallantry to the fountain-head.

In all fairness, he is trying to keep his aristocratic cool. He presents a picture of unflappable charm and chivalry. "First," he says, "I have never been a member of any other party except the Congress. And, after 1980, when it became clear that Mrs Gandhi's Congress was the real Congress, it crystallised my decision to join. Mind you, I've been watching the political situation carefully; and a political party, you will agree, is necessary to get you back into the mainstream of politics."

As a member of the old guard of Congress(S) he joined the coalition government headed by Charan Singh. Months after the 1980 election, he quit the party to sit as an independent. No, he hasn't frittered away the intervening years. He's written the first volume of his much-appreciated autobiography; the second volume is on its way. But his real contribution has been as president of the Virat Hindu Samaj, "an entirely new non-political platform" he established in September



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

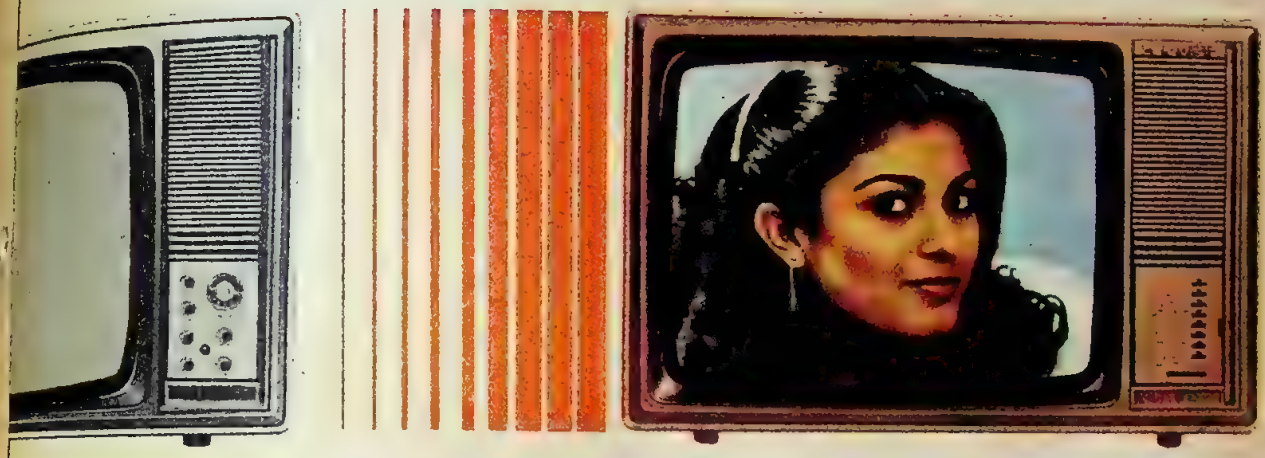
Dr Karan Singh: noble plunge

1981 to herald what he calls the "Hindu renaissance". It's because he believes it's "ridiculous for Hindus to feel defensive and apologetic for being a majority community". Not because it may help him in consolidating his Dogra base in the Jammu parliamentary constituency from where he hopes to contest in the coming election. The switch from Udhampur, comes not because of a diminishing lead but because "Jammu is the nerve-centre of the region".

There's no explanation however as to how he'll get that seat, if Congress(I) loyalist Girdhari Lal Dogra, the sitting MP is nominated again. Dr Karan Singh has no explanation for such details. With that romantic look in his eyes, he reverts to playing prince again. "It's time for change. Every 18 years is a watershed mark in my life. I was head of state in Kashmir for 18 years, MP from Udhampur for 18. Now let's see." But if wishes were horses even princes would ride them.

—SUNIL SETHI

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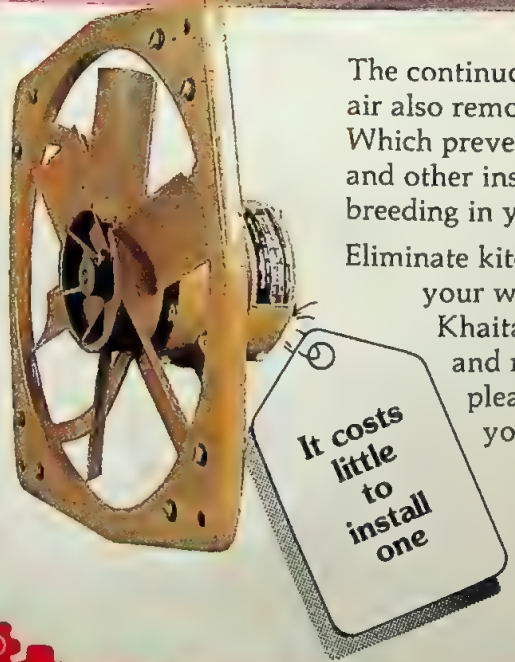
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TAMIL NADU

Forging Links

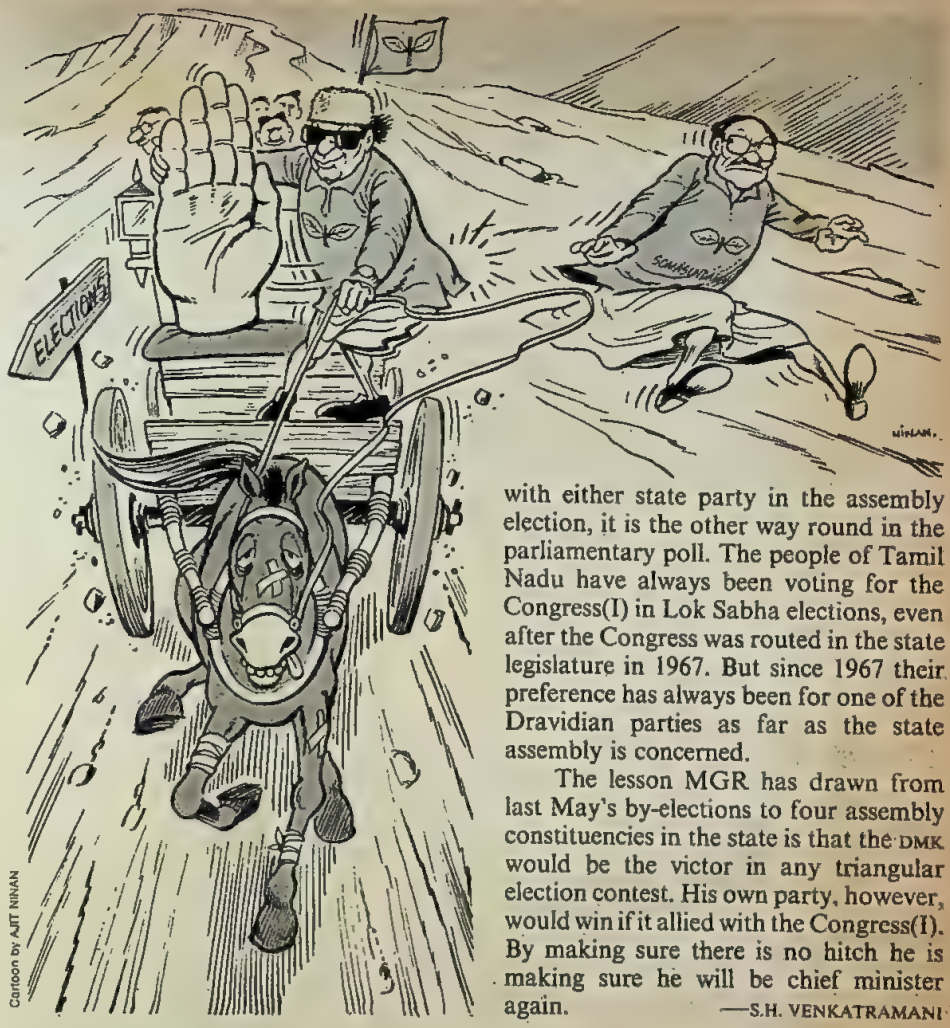


TAMIL Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran is clearly going out of his way to please the Congress(I). With his sights set on the forthcoming Lok Sabha and assembly elections, the chief minister sought a certificate of commendation from the Congress(I) by removing eight Tiruchi-Thanjavur belt AIADMK leaders whose only crime apparently was that they were loyal followers of S.D. Somasundaram, the food minister. Somasundaram who hails from Thanjavur and has perhaps the largest following in the party after the chief minister is a very vocal campaigner against the Congress(I). So are all his loyalists.

With the first stroke of his executive axe, the chief minister removed D. Murugesan alias Murugan, the party secretary in Srirangam; R. Baluswamy, secretary of Karur; K. Shankar, party secretary at Thadhoni in Tiruchi district; and Harikrishnan, a prominent public speaker of the party in Tiruchi. A few days later, four more leaders of Srirangam were asked to quit.

The removal of these men was based on a complaint that they and Somasundaram had worked against Congress(I) candidate Ayyaru Vandayar in last May's by-election when a formal AIADMK-Congress(I) alliance was in existence. The ruling party's office secretary in Madras, Durai, refused to comment on whether the expulsion of more Somasundaram loyalists was on the cards saying only: "All I can tell you is that when we ask someone to leave the party we have to give a proper expulsion order."

When the second AIADMK Government came to power in 1980, MGR made Somasundaram minister for excise, revenue and commercial taxes. Somasundaram looked after his portfolios well. With him in the excise saddle, the liquor industry in the state registered an annual growth rate of about 20 per cent in turnover, the annual revenue from liquor today being approximately Rs 230 crore. Somasundaram also introduced the Benami Land Bill which would have enabled the Government to take over and redistribute thousands of acres of agricultural land to the landless. The state legislature passed the bill unanimously but the President refused his assent.



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Much of the benami land was believed to be in the hands of Congress(I) leaders.

The revenue from commercial taxes also showed a steep chimb during Somasundaram's tenure. It was Rs 250 crore when he took over, today it stands at Rs 750 crore. But in spite of this he was first stripped of the excise portfolio and then last month of the commercial taxes and revenue as well. The crumb of the food portfolio has now been thrown to him instead. Says DMK President M. Karunanidhi: "MGR has been going out of his way to cultivate the Congress(I) by humiliating Somasundaram. If Somasundaram has self-respect he should leave the AIADMK."

Another measure that the chief minister is taking to safeguard his alliance with the Congress(I) and prevent it from letting down his party during the parliamentary elections after riding on its back during the assembly poll is to hold the assembly elections at the same time as those for the Lok Sabha. Past experience in Tamil Nadu shows that while the Congress(I) can gain by tying itself up with either state party in the assembly election, it is the other way round in the parliamentary poll. The people of Tamil Nadu have always been voting for the Congress(I) in Lok Sabha elections, even after the Congress was routed in the state legislature in 1967. But since 1967 their preference has always been for one of the Dravidian parties as far as the state assembly is concerned.

The lesson MGR has drawn from last May's by-elections to four assembly constituencies in the state is that the DMK would be the victor in any triangular election contest. His own party, however, would win if it allied with the Congress(I). By making sure there is no hitch he is making sure he will be chief minister again.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

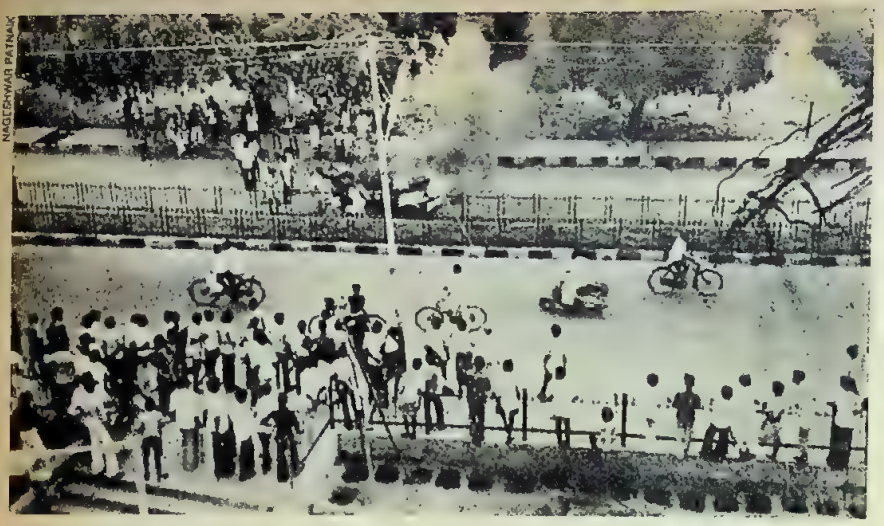
ORISSA

Untamed Anger



BEDLAM seemed to have been let loose on the otherwise placid Bhubaneswar early this month when over 5,000 agitated students clashed with the police and in the process boosted the tally of Opposition charges against the ruling ministry. Veteran Janata leader and former chief minister Biju Patnaik lost no time to capitalise on the incident and charged: "A trigger-happy government went berserk because it did not have the courage to face the students after the Burla massacre."

The students had converged on the capital from all over the state to present a memorandum to Chief Minister Janki Ballav Patnaik protesting against the killing of students at Burla on July 14 (INDIA TODAY, August 15, 1984). As policemen wielded their lathis with abandon,





A burning jeep after the violence (left) and Jena receiving medical attention

the irate students went on a rampage, burning buildings and vehicles. By nightfall, the Congress(I) Bhavan, the ruling party's headquarters, was in a shambles, at least 10 private and government vehicles were burnt to ashes and three big hotels badly damaged. Worse, the police raided the home of Janata legislator Ashok Das and beat him up. His colleague Ajoy Mohapatra too suffered the same fate while the outspoken Janata MLA Damodar Rout was jailed early the following morning. The outburst by the police left senior journalists Swarup Jena of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and Pramod Das of the *Prajatantra* badly injured. Jena, limbs broken and bleeding profusely, was given medical attention only five hours later. The attack on journalists so infuriated the local press that the city's five dailies refused to print on August 5.

The police crack-down was obviously directed against the Opposition leaders who were accused of inciting violence in the wake of Burla and attempting to destabilise the Patnaik Ministry. Orissa Congress(I) working president D. Ulaka alleged: "Having failed to use the students to create large-scale violence and disorder, the Janata Party is now using hired goondas and antisocial elements to create violence in the state."

The students' demonstration came in response to a call by the All Orissa Students' Action Committee to present a 10-point charter of demands to the chief minister, including suspension of all officials connected with the Burla incident and release of all students. As the students poured in and proceeded towards the secretariat from Utkal University campus, they found police blocking all the roads. Clashes finally broke out near the parade ground opposite the secretariat. As the police lobbed teargas shells and opened blank fire, the mob melted away, leaving in its trail arson and destruction. The home department reported 60 including 17 officers, hurt.



This agitation has been whipped up by the opposition. The majority of the rioters were non-students.

—J.B. PATNAIK chief minister

The students and lawyers led by the former Bar Council of India president Ranjit Mohanty have been agitating for a month and stray incidents of violence had been reported from places like Baripada, Nimapara, Raigada, and general strikes had been called in several major towns of the state. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and other student bodies had decided to boycott the inquiry commission on the Burla incident and set up a parallel commission headed by Ranjit Mohanty. Worried by the strong reaction, the state Government ordered the preventive arrests of over 150 students and directed the police and principals of colleges to identify antisocial elements. Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik told INDIA TODAY: "This agitation has been whipped up by the Opposition. The majority of the rioters were non-students."

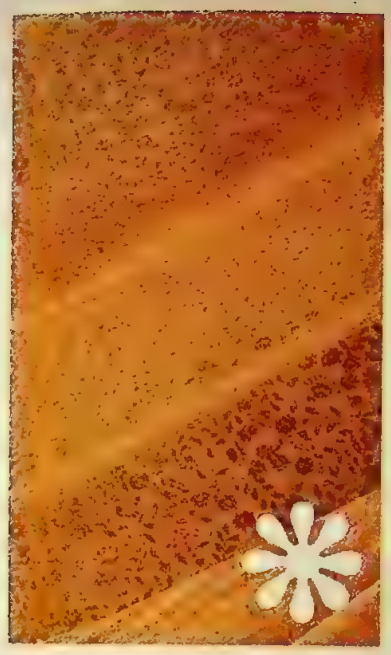
But Burla Engineering College students' union secretary Susan Das and Opposition leader Janata Party President Biju Patnaik brushed aside the allegation. Patnaik said he had directed his party workers to give only moral support to the students. However, the long-standing Congress(I)-Opposition cold war was evident when on the eve of the agitation, 12 Congress(I) MLA's made a press statement, reminding the students of Biju Patnaik's bloody and ruthless suppression of students in 1964.

Asked why his government had been arresting thousands of students since the Burla incident, the chief minister replied: "I do not know how many students have been arrested. But the police have to arrest students if it is necessary to maintain law and order."

Biju Patnaik has since announced his party's all-out support to the students charging that the clashes were "provoked" by Government which had "converted a disciplined police force into indisciplined musclemen to serve the political ends of the ruling party".

However, the Orrissa chief minister could have precipitated a crisis by his inept handling of the problem. In his enthusiasm to please him, the administration stirred up a situation perfect for the Opposition to attack the chief minister with and which could prove decisive in the coming elections.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar



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The Bhasha Samiti convention at Jaigaon

NEPALIS

Demanding a Voice

IN WHAT threatens to become yet another language controversy, the six-million-odd Nepali-speaking Indians scattered all over the country are organising themselves into a political force. At a little reported conclave of Nepali leaders, held at Jaigaon near the Indo-Bhutan border in late June, the Nepali bhasha (language) movement was given a new lease of life. Declares Enos Das Pradhan, one of the organisers: "All our 385 units in the country have been instructed to tell our people that no political party, especially the Congress(I) has any right to ask for our votes unless they agree to the immediate inclusion of Nepali in the eighth schedule."

The Nepali leaders decision to take a firm line follows their recent failures in getting official recognition for their language. "Before the last Lok Sabha elections, Mrs Gandhi had agreed that our demand was justified," said Prem Kumar Allay, president of the All India Nepali Bhasha Samiti which has its headquarters in Darjeeling. "But when we met her last year, she backtracked and said she had problems in acceding to our demands." A hunger strike by the Samiti in New Delhi last February was broken up by the police and the leaders, including Allay, arrested. Says Allay: "From then on we decided there would be no more memorandums, no more hunger strikes and no more demonstrations."

The Nepali vote, although not decisive in more than four Lok Sabha constituencies—Sikkim, Darjeeling, Garhwal and Assam—could be used as a major lever in a number of constituencies in the 13 states where Nepali-speaking people are concentrated. The single biggest stronghold of Nepali-speaking people, however, continues to be Sikkim where, Allay says, "the language issue will be the deciding factor in the next elections." Most Nepali-speaking people in Sikkim and elsewhere are now convinced that Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the former chief minister, was dismissed because he championed their cause. Said Jagat Chhetry, the samiti's working president: "The Centre wanted Bhandari to forego the three demands—inclusion of Nepali in the eighth schedule, citizenship for 30,000 stateless Sikkimese and reservation of seats for Nepali-speaking people—if he wanted to remain in power, but Bhandari refused."

The Bhasha Samiti's strongest suit is its broad-based support among all Nepali-speaking Indians, irrespective of their political affiliations. Says Ananda Pathak, the CPI(M) Lok Sabha member from Darjeeling: "Nepali is the lingua franca of more than 20 million people in the hill regions and the demand for its inclusion in the eighth schedule is only democratic." According to Pathak and others, even other hill communities like the Lepchas and the Bhutias use Nepali as the common language and would welcome its recognition. Strangely enough, the Congress(I) itself, in its last election manifesto, had demanded the recognition of the Nepali language.

"The problem," laments Allay, "is that all political parties have so far given us lip service but have actually done very little." As a result the Samiti has resolved to ask their local units to assess the sincerity of individuals and political

Most Nepali speaking people consider the recognition of their language a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of their Indian identity.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



parties contesting for the next elections. Decisions regarding Nepali support to different candidates was decided at a meeting to be held in Darjeeling on 25 August. Apart from the samiti's representatives from different states, two representatives each from the Congress (I), Gorkha League, CPI (M) and the CPI had also been invited. Significantly, the Congress (I) did not respond to the invitation, which would put the Congress(I) leaders of Assam's 2 million Nepalis at a clear disadvantage.

Apart from Nar Bahadur Bhandari's Sikkim Ganasangram Parishad, the party to have gained in the bargain is the CPI(M). Both the West Bengal and the Tripura state assemblies have passed unanimous resolutions urging the Centre to include Nepali in the eighth schedule. The CPI (M) has been very scrupulous in attending the Bhasha Samiti meetings, while the West Bengal chief minister has pledge to take up cudgels on behalf of the samiti against the Centre on this issue. On the other hand, the Gorkha League with its diminishing power base secretly resents the CPI(M)'s exploitation of the language issue. While the Gorkha League favours the samiti's decision to act politically, its President P.T. Lama feels "that the Centre might have gone cold on the language demand because of the CPI(M)'s involvement".

Unlike Mrs Indira Gandhi who remarked in Gangtok last year that the language issue is "more an emotional demand than a rational one", most Nepali-speaking people consider the recognition of their language a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of their Indian identity. Keshav Pradhan, a young student voiced the anguish of thousands like him: "At every stage in our lives we have to prove that we are Indians; in all forms we have to classify ourselves as Indian Nepalis, which no Bengali has to do, despite the fact that there are millions of non-Indian Bengalis." And, as Dr B.K.Pradhan, author of a Sahitya Academy book on Nepali literature pointed out: "We are taken as immigrants from Nepal although we have nothing to do with that country any more."

The Nepalis have felt slighted ever since 1956 when they launched the movement to get their language recognised in the Indian Constitution. The biggest blow came when Janata prime minister Morarji Desai announced in Darjeeling on May 29 1979 that Nepali was a foreign language and couldn't possibly be included in the eighth schedule. "Our loyalty to India has always been called into question," says Allay angrily and feels it is time the Nepalis in India hit where it hurts.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Darjeeling

DARJEELING

Identity Crisis

Majority of people in Darjeeling are increasingly of the opinion that the state Government in Calcutta has little concern for the hill people. Even the local CPI(M) MP, Ananda Pathak, admits: "The people of this region have their own peculiar problems, which they could best solve themselves if they had regional autonomy." Pathak, along with two other CPI(M) MP's, has submitted a bill (No. 59 of 1982) in Parliament seeking regional autonomy for the district. However, the disinclination of the Left Front Government to grant statutory powers to the ineffective Hill Development Council (HDC) and to make it an elected body has convinced many that even the CPI(M) is not really interested in giving Darjeeling any real form of autonomy.

On the other hand, "the strong desire of Darjeeling's Nepali-speaking people to establish their Indian identity has convinced them of the need for a separate state within India," argues I.B. Rai, 1977 Sahitya Academy award winner and founder of the Pranta Parishad, an organisation formed in August 1980 to press for separate statehood. The membership of the Parishad has been increased with the entry of Madan Tamang, Prem Thapa, Kumar Bhatia, Gajendra Gurung and Madan Thapa, former leaders of the Gorkha League and Congress(I). The Parishad was formed following the refusal of the Gorkha League leader, the late D.P. Rai, to adopt a resolution for



"Attempts to establish a separate state will only cut us off from the mainstream and leave us worse off."

—ANANDA PATHAK, CPI(M) MP

separate statehood at the HDC meeting of July 1980.

"The curse of Nepali-speaking Indians is that they are confused with citizens of Nepal," explains Durga Pradhan, general secretary of the militant Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Both the GNLF and the Pranta Parishad insist on calling Indian Nepalis Gorkhas, "because the term Nepali connotes a person from Nepal while we have nothing to do with Nepal," says Pradhan. In fact, a GNLF delegation led by its President, Subhash Ghisingh, submitted a memorandum to the King of Nepal demanding the abrogation of the portion of the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty that allows the free access of Nepali nationals into India.

Although the Pranta Parishad shares the statehood demand, it considers the GNLF to be somewhat extremist in its views. Says Parishad leader Rai: "We believe in operating within the Indian Constitution and see no reason to send delegations to a foreign country." The Parishad plans to use the electoral system to press for its demands. Both the GNLF and the Parishad called for a boycott of the last assembly elections in 1982, which, says Rai, "resulted in the CPI(M) gaining most of the Darjeeling assembly seats".

The only party of singnificance in Darjeeling which continues to openly opposed the statehood demand is the CPI(M). Other CPI(M) leaders admit that the HDC has been able to do very little and that most of the money spent to develop the area has been siphoned off by contractors and officials. But the solution lies in educating their cadres to fight the corruption in the system and strengthen the working of the HDC. "Attempts to establish a separate state will only cut us off from the mainstream and leave us worse off," says Pathak. But a growing number of Nepalis in Darjeeling do not agree.

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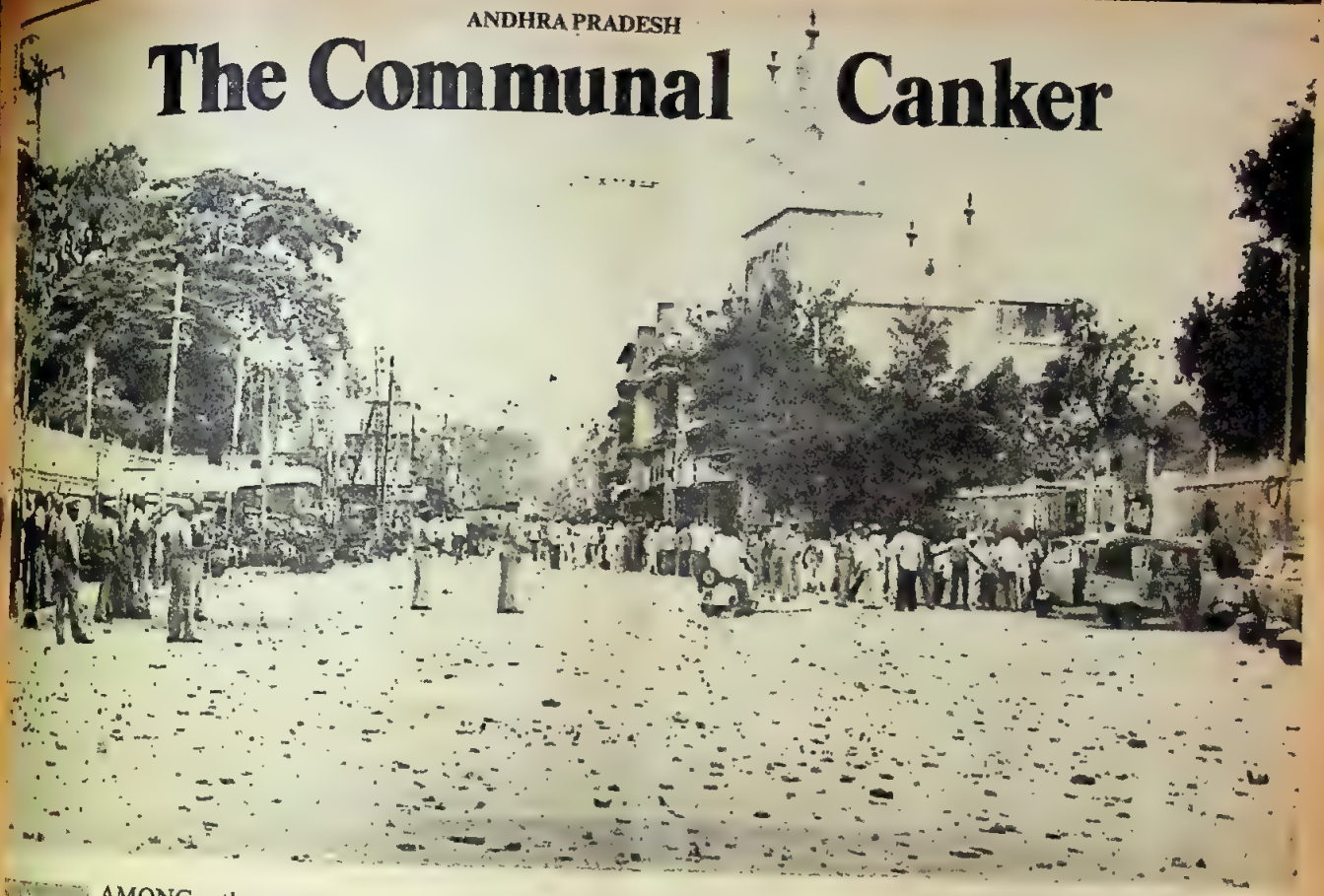
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ANDHRA PRADESH

The Communal Canker



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AMONG the poorer Hindus of the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, there is a belief that worship of the Goddess Kali prevents smallpox. Though the deadly disease has been wiped out, the Goddess is now the indirect cause of an even deadlier virus, communalism, an epidemic that now stalks the streets of Hyderabad with recurring regularity. At least 15 people died late last month in the latest bout of communal violence that spread rapidly from areas in Hyderabad's old city to other towns covering five districts.

What made matters worse was the time the state Government took to come to grips with the situation. Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, in Houston for coronary by-pass surgery had not named anyone in charge of the state during his absence. And no minister was prepared to take on the responsibility when the situation turned ugly. It was only when Governor Ram Lal summoned Finance Minister N. Bhaskara Rao to apprise him of the situation and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs P. Venkatasubbaiah announced in New Delhi that he would be shortly leaving for Hyderabad that the state Government finally reacted. Venkatasubbaiah, however, departed from Hyderabad without saying a word on the subject since local Congress(I) activists obviously differed on the causes of the riots depending on which community they belonged to.

Trouble erupted on July 22 when a procession of Kali worshippers was stoned as it passed by the Muslim-dominated area of Moghalpura. Retaliation led to a fracas in which one person was killed before police arrived to prevent more bloodshed. But the police did not view the incident as a serious communal situation for the next day a 10,000-strong congregation of Kali worshippers was allowed to pass by the same area. Though police presence had been beefed up, the procession was attacked and all hell broke loose with shops being looted and vehicles set on fire. When the police finally opened fire on the rioters it was obvious that Hyderabad was in for another round of communal blood-letting.

The following Friday, a group of young men attacked a police party and knifed passers-by. Riots broke out simultaneously in five other places, leading Police Commissioner K. Vijayarama Rao to admit that it was an organised affair. What puzzled observers was that the curfew clamped after the first incident of violence was inexplicably relaxed on Friday, the day the riots spread.

The apathy of the administration in the absence of firm political direction was evident. It was only on July 29 that four MLA's—Bakar Agha, Amanullah Khan, Khaja Abu Syed of the Majlis and A. Narendra of BJP—were detained under the National Security Act (NSA). And last fortnight Salauddin Owaisi, (MLA) and president of the Majlis was also detained. During the riots curfew was clamped and relaxed without properly sizing up the situation. The Chief Secretary Shravan Kumar, accompanied by the Director-General of Police K.G. Erady visited Mecca Masjid at dusk nearly five hours after the trouble broke out. The heaviest death toll was during a curfew break when five people were knifed at Sultan Shahi on July 29. The police retaliated by reimposing curfew without a break for six days.

As the violence entered the second week and the Telugu Desam ministers decided to go on marches through the city, the police began a search of houses for potential trouble-makers, for knives and other arms and also confiscated a number of unlicensed loud-speakers at mosques

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DU 601


A. PRABHAKAR RAO

Part of the recurring problem is the administrative and political neglect. Last year Rama Rao announced that Rs 100 crore would be spent on developing the old city but so far no beginning has been made.

and temples. The police discovered that only 35 of the 270-odd loud-speakers were licensed.

Initial investigations were revealing in that it was found that most of the offenders are jobless people with no record of earlier communal offenses. It appeared that the Muslims were being instigated by the Majlis-Ittehadual Muslimeen and the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Hindus by the RSS and the BJP who wield powerful clout in the old city.

Successive governments in Andhra Pradesh have been slow to understand fully the implications of this trend. Both the parties have been emerging stronger with every passing election. The Congress(I) had electoral alliance with the Majlis till 1980 and the Telugu Desam had links first with the Majlis and then with the BJP in 1983. The recent round of trouble is because of the growing sense of insecurity of the Majlis as it is cut from both the ruling Telugu Desam and the Congress(I). In the 1983 elections the Majlis won five seats, two more than at any time in the past while the BJP for the first time won two seats. Clearly, the Congress(I) is at a disadvantage in another election year and will try to placate the Majlis for some support during the Lok Sabha elections. The evidence came in the manner in which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met Owaisi in New Delhi last fortnight when the police wanted to detain him under NSA in Hyderabad.

The Congress(I) has helped the Majlis gain property for its headquarters at Darus Salaam in Hyderabad. It was handed over to Owaisi by chief minister J. Vengala Rao in 1976 on Mrs Gandhi's suggestion. Later during the Lok Sabha poll, she and Owaisi shared a common platform as the parties reached an electoral understanding.

But part of the recurring problem is the administrative and political neglect. Last year, Rama Rao announced that Rs 100 crore would be spent on developing the old city but so far no beginning has been made. Only one of the six new police stations planned for the old city has been opened and an ambitious plan to have four regional police control rooms for the entire metropolitan area is still gathering dust. Says BJP General Secretary Bandaru Dattatreya: "The Telugu Desam administration has failed to tackle the basic issues of the old city like developing civic facilities and creating more jobs for the poor."

By last week, Hyderabad had limped back to some semblance of normalcy but there are ominous signs that the communal violence is far from contained. The flexing of communal muscles is in greater evidence when there are large religious processions as there will be when the Ganesh and Pankah cavalcades appear on the streets in September. So far demands to ban the processions have come to naught. Says Syed Rashid Pasha Quadri, Ameer of the Jamila Nazemia: "Religion is not to be taken out into the streets and a ban on all festive processions is the only way to avoid communal clashes in Hyderabad." But with the administration and political parties reluctant to impose such restrictions, it looks as though Rama Rao will have a hot reception waiting for him on his return.

—AMARNATH K. MENON





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BIHAR

Reconciliation Strategy



ON THE surface, it seems the Bihar Congress(I) has put its house in order. This impression was heightened last fortnight by the sight of Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh and his arch rival Jagannath Mishra shaking hands, dining together and later addressing the party from the same platform. Said Singh with a smile: "Mishra has assured this government his ungrudging cooperation." Added Mishra: "Factionalism or groupism will not be allowed to harm the party. I and my supporters will now support the Government. The party has been saved."

The announcement of the patch-up in New Delhi and Patna last week came barely four days before the monsoon session of the state Assembly began. Until then speculation had been rife that Mishra and his supporters might join hands with the Opposition to pull down Singh's Government, which was only a week away from completing one year in change of the state.

The handshaking between Mishra and Singh was sudden and dramatic, with a number of compromises on both sides. For Singh, it was a question of survival. But for Mishra it meant only balm for his ego and a psychological victory. The real credit, according to Kamanath Singh Thakur Bithreto, a prominent dissident, should go to Rajiv Gandhi whose "political maturity" saw to it that the party in the state remained united and strong.

Rajiv had in fact acted like an imperious schoolteacher with a stick in his hand when he suddenly summoned both Chandrashekhar Singh and Mishra to Delhi. He then directed the obliging Bhishma Narayan Singh, governor of Assam, to ensure that both drove in the same car, dined together and ironed out their differences. Once this was achieved, the two were asked to drive to Rajiv's house for discussions with him.

Mishra, who had been complaining that there was a communication gap between him and the high command on the one hand and that he and his supporters were being systematically eased out from the party by Singh on the other (INDIA TODAY, July 31), once face to face with Rajiv and later with the prime minister spelt out his grievances and used his considerable support in the 220-member legislature party as a bargaining counter. The former chief minister reportedly put up some pre-conditions before he and his supporters extended their whole-hearted cooperation to the Government. Though Chief Minister Singh later denied that there were any pre-conditions, INDIA TODAY learnt through party sources that some of the important points of agreement included:

- ▶ suspensions of all Mishra supporters based on the reports of the Pradesh Congress Committee-I (PCC-I) would be withdrawn;
- ▶ PCC(I) chief Ram Sharan Prasad Singh would be replaced;
- ▶ all the seven district Congress(I) committees headed by Mishra supporters which were suppressed would be restored;
- ▶ Mishra would be consulted on all important matters and his supporters would be involved at all levels; and
- ▶ the Cabinet would be reshuffled and the PCC(I) reconstituted to give adequate representations to Mishra supporters.

Mishra was also given a hint that he might be inducted into the Central Cabinet with the industry portfolio, an offer hitherto unacceptable to him. Mishra's supporters, suspended on the eve of the Bettiah Lok Sabha by-election last December on the charge of working against the party nominee were taken back and the suspensions of two others, Raghunath Jha and Mahachandra Prasad Singh after the recent assembly by-elections were under the reconsideration of the high command. The search for a candidate to head the state Congress committee in place of Ram Sharan Prasad Singh was already going full steam ahead.

As a part of the reconciliation strategy Singh issued a statement saying: "He (Mishra) offered me his ungrudging cooperation and all of us shall involve him fully and utilise his abilities in the best interests of the party. He is a senior member of the party and fuller participation on his part should certainly prove fruitful."

The offer to Mishra of a ministerial berth in the Union Cabinet was confirmed by Congress(I) Working President Kamlapati Tripathi in New Delhi. This coincided with the announcement of the date for a by-election to the Rajya Sabha to fill the vacancy of Bhishma Narayan Singh. If Mishra agrees, he will have to go to the Rajya Sabha, which would mean his exit from Bihar politics. But knowing Mishra's ambition, few believe Singh will rest easy for long.

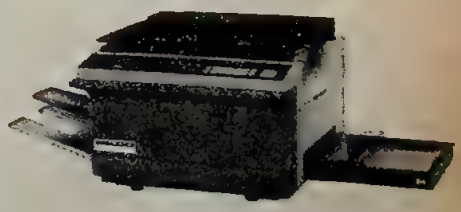
—FARZAND AHMED



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The Dhanalakshmi Bank (left) and Ayyar: at the receiving end

KERALA

Withdrawal Symptoms



THE MANAGEMENT of temple funds has never been free of controversy, and the Guruvayur shrine dedicated to the young Sri Krishna in Trichur district is no exception. Last month, the Guruvayur Devaswom abruptly directed the withdrawal of some Rs 55 lakh held in 33 fixed deposits in the Dhanalakshmi Bank next door.

The move raised eyebrows because the fixed deposits had yet to mature and the Devaswom lost about Rs 2.5 lakh in interest. In any other circumstances, the action of the trustees would have come under fire. Not in Guruvayur. The reason: the withdrawal was widely seen as a strike at the Dhanalakshmi Bank, particularly at its Chairman Harihara Ayyar, who has launched a systematic campaign to cleanse the bank of politicking by a Congress (I)-led union, the Dhanalakshmi Bank Officers Congress. The Guruvayur shrine is particularly dear to Chief Minister K. Karunakaran. Seven of the nominated members on the Devaswom committee are Karunakaran nominees.

Committee Chairman P.T. Mohankrishnan said that he had been guided in his decision solely by his concern for the safety of Sri Krishna's wealth, and he felt that the bank was on the verge of a crisis. Others see it as a thinly disguised attempt to shake the financial viability of the bank. If that was so, it obviously misfired. There was no run on the bank whose deposits had risen to Rs 53.12 crore in 1983 from Rs 6.43 crore in 1974. On the contrary, the number of depositors has increased in spite of a spate of telephone calls from the Guruvayur authorities to other large depositors to withdraw their funds.

Even so, the abrupt withdrawal has disturbed Ayyar, 45, who is on deputation from the State Bank of India. Appointed in August 1983, ostensibly on recommendation from the chief minister, Ayyar has been at the receiving end of threatening telephone calls and wall graffiti. "I have become a mental wreck," he says, "I have even applied for a firearms licence." Ayyar's problems have arisen from his detailed examination of the bank's working which showed up a large number of unaccountable transactions involving, particularly, members of the Congress(I)-leaning officers union.

According to a senior official of the bank, such malpractices uncovered were:

► an advance of Rs 10,000 by a bank manager to a former Congress(I) MLA for election purposes;

► the sanction of loans for agricultural purposes and a firewood business to a Congress (I) worker, and another loan to his wife for the purchase of groceries;

► the sanction of a Rs 15 lakh overdraft facility to a contractor purely on a political recommendation.

Karunakaran at Guruvayur shrine



Following this, Ayyar has sacked four employees, suspended another four and transferred some others, all owing allegiance to the union, which is led by T.V. Chandramohan. Last fortnight, Chandramohan and Mohankrishnan visited Delhi to plead with the Union Deputy Finance Minister Janardhan Poojari to remove Ayyar immediately. Chandramohan has charged Ayyar with "unleashing terror on Congress(I) men even though we appointed him chairman". Defending himself, Ayyar says he intends to continue his efforts to streamline the bank.

Leaders of various Hindu organisations in the state have, meanwhile, demanded a judicial inquiry into the working of the Guruvayur Devaswom committee. Bharatiya Janata Party leader O. Rajagopal has charged that the withdrawal of funds was "an outrageously illegal act and a clear case of political interference in the affairs of the temple". In fact, the affairs of the shrine were under investigation by the Shankaran Nair Commission set up by the state Government, and one of its recommendations was to reconstitute the boards of the Devaswom and make sure that people with connections with political parties were kept out. But it is far from certain that the recommendations will have any effect. Old hands remember that a similar investigation was done 10 years ago and its recommendations on the reorganisation of the temple remain unimplemented till today.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Guruvayur



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PUNJAB

Trial of the Terrorists



LESS than a month from now, a large number of the 443 Punjab terrorists detained in the wake of Operation Bluestar are to be formally charged for the most heinous offence in the country—waging a war, a crime punishable with hanging or imprisonment for life under section 121 of the IPC. The historic case launched by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will provide probably the only detailed official account of the terrorists' activities besides a revealing glimpse of how Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's hit squads went about their work of murder and mayhem.

But CBI cases, the result of painstaking investigations stretching over 12 weeks, will not be made public. The trial is to be held in camera in any of the special courts in Ferozepur, Ambala and Patiala and the terrorists are to be tried under the recently promulgated Terrorists Affected Area (Special) Ordinance. The amendment to the Evidence Act will put the onus on those accused to prove that they are not terrorists.

The ordinance and the amendment give far-reaching powers to the investigating agencies, but since the confessions of the detained terrorists are not admissible in courts the CBI has to establish, with documentary evidence, what many already believe: that Bhindranwale wanted a separate state and that he armed the terrorists to kill anyone who came in the way of achieving that goal or spoke against it.

The strategy is to prove that those detained are terrorists—by obtaining statements from witnesses, copies of Bhindranwale's tapes to show that he preached bloodshed, posters demanding Khalistan, incriminating Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee documents and by linking some of the gruesome murders with those terrorists now in jail. To do this, 25 CBI officers have been at work and three teams have been formed—one to interrogate the terrorists, another to collect evidence of them waging war and the third to locate the source of the arms supply to the Golden Temple. Cases of waging war have come up only twice after Independence, in Travancore in 1955 and in Patna in 1952. They were rejected both times unequivocally.



Significantly two of the prominent accused, Bhindranwale and Amrik Singh, are dead. The one still alive, Harminder Singh Sandhu is likely to be the main accused in the waging war case.

The present CBI enquiry was launched on the basis of a first information report lodged on June 14, 1984, in case No. RC/II/84 SIU III. Significantly two of the prominent accused, Bhindranwale and Amrik Singh, are dead. The one still alive, Harminder Singh Sandhu, general secretary of the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF) is likely to be the main accused in the waging war case.

The CBI seems inclined to finalise its waging war case first and other cases relating to violence and sedition later. Interrogation reports have thrown up some clues. Bhindranwale's "inner council" consisted of Rachpal Singh, his personal assistant, Harminder Singh Sandhu, Amrik Singh, president of the AISSF, Kabul Singh and Ram Singh. If the confessions are to be taken seriously, all major executions were discussed at "council" meetings. Investigators have little doubt that the murders had the approval of Bhindranwale. The "inner council" would decide the target and volunteers would be called in to bump off the victims. Arms were issued by a trusted Bhindranwale aide. Interrogations so far do not suggest careful planning before each execution. The details were generally worked out by the "volunteers" themselves.

Less than a dozen hit men are said to have been involved in the murders of prominent people like Lala Jagat Narain, Congress(I) MP V.N. Tiwari and former Delhi SGPC chief H.S. Manchanda. Most of these hit men are believed to be dead. They included Surinder Singh Sodhi, described as a notorious killer who was present when innocent bus passengers were killed in Punjab, Satinder Jit Singh P.T., a known extortioner in Amritsar, who actually asked Hindu shopkeepers to deposit Rs 10,000 each if they wanted to stay in Amritsar, and Kabul Singh, one of the two men involved in the murder of the Nirankari chief Baba Gurbachan Singh in 1980. In the murders of Tiwari, Manchanda and a sanitary inspector, the same weapon—a 7.63 mm Mauser—was used.

Two of the hit men who are alive and in detention are Sukhdev Singh, a dismissed constable, and Virsa Singh. According to CBI sources, both have confessed their involvement in some of the prominent murders. Of the six in Bhindranwale's inner council three men—Rachpal Singh, Sandhu and Amrik Singh—were well educated and held M.A. degrees. The others, Gurmukh Singh, Kabul Singh and Ram Singh were illiterate and provided the muscle for the organisation.

This inner council was assisted by two retired army officers—Major General Shahbeg Singh, the Mukti Bahini hero and a master tactician, who was shot in the Golden Temple storming provided

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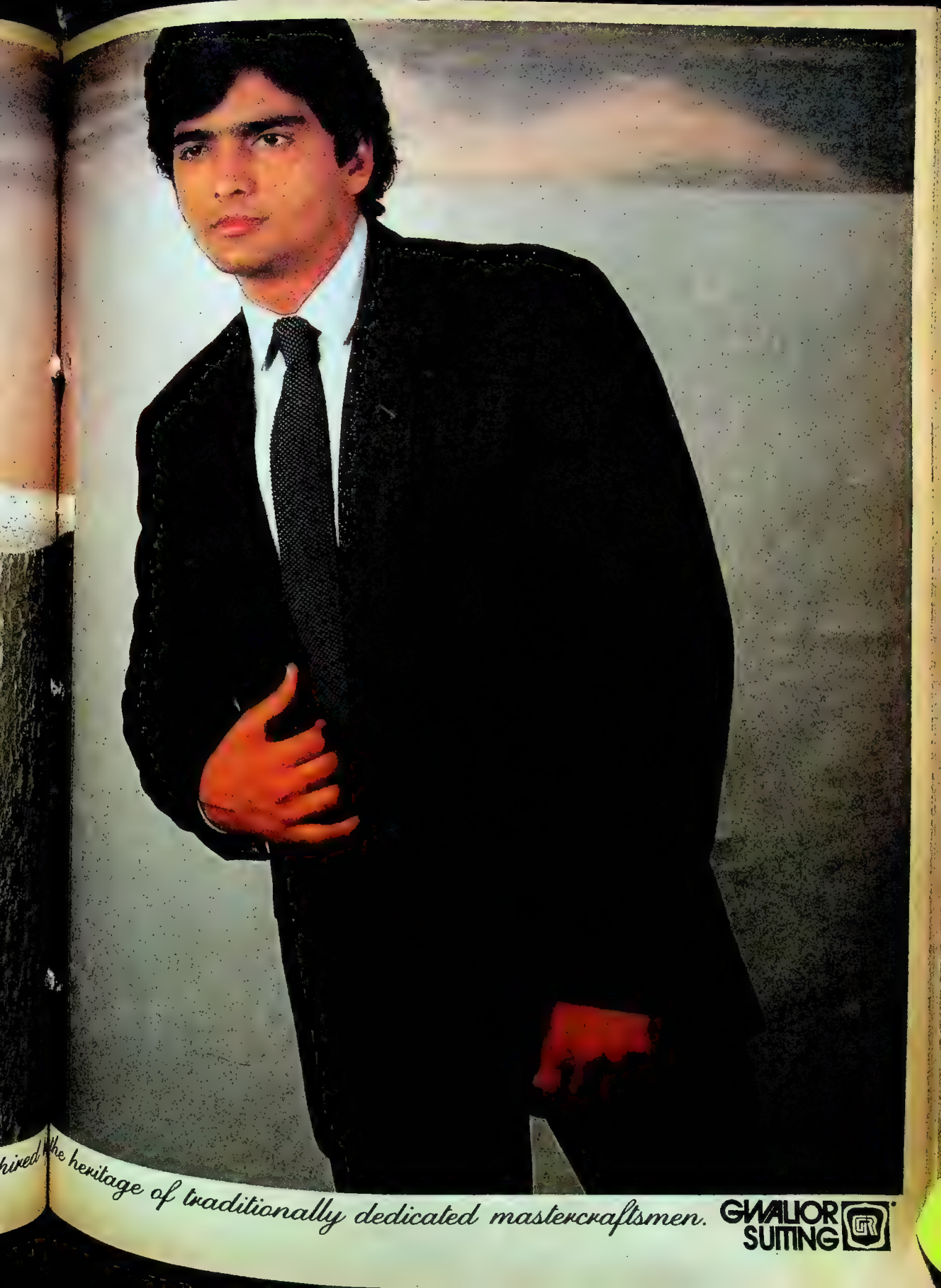
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the training to the terrorists. Brigadier Mahendar Singh, who was arrested at his house in Amritsar, is alleged to have provided the weapons needed.

The weapons enquiry relating to the source of supply is so far a non-starter. The CBI has discovered that most of the arms were of Indian origin. The ball is now in the court of the army authorities who have been asked to furnish details on the basis of weapon markings. As a CBI official points out, however, the question is not merely one of arms, but of how the terrorists collected the huge funds required to buy those arms.

Other revelations do not seem to be startling, but some of Sandhu's disclosures are illuminating. He is believed to have admitted to having close links with Daljit Singh, the hijacker who diverted the Indian Airlines plane to Lahore in 1981. Significantly, in the recent hijacking, the terrorists wanted to talk only to Sandhu. He has also claimed that there was no such organisation as the Dashmesh Regiment, it was only a loose body of ex-servicemen mobilised by Major-General Shahbeg Singh. The systematic burning of 37 railway stations in Punjab was also organised by the retired army general. Sandhu continues to insist that Bhindranwale never wanted a separate state and that he never did hear the army's appeals asking terrorists to surrender. Had he heard the appeals, Sandhu is reported to have told his interlocutors, he would have given himself up.

That, however, contrasts with his initial reactions when he was caught. He is reported to have said: "I do not repent for my actions." Sandhu parted with information only when he was led to believe that his wife was still alive. She was in fact killed when she pulled out a revolver as military authorities surrounded the house in Amritsar where she had taken shelter.

It was only a month after his detention at the Ajmer Central Jail that Sandhu came to know the truth. On July 22, his father Dalsingh Sandhu, met him for the first time and told him that his wife's body had been taken away. The visit was the first official interaction with outsiders for Sandhu and 33 other terrorists in Ajmer Central Jail.

Like Sandhu, most of them do not seem to regret their actions. They are kept in the maximum security area of the prison, in four barracks. Troops of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary are permanently posted there and the fencing around the high wall of the central jail has been doubled. There continues to be a tight veil of secrecy around the terrorists' detention. They have a separate jail staff of six people, their food is checked by intelligence personnel and they have a special roll-call at 2 p.m. everyday. They are not given any newspapers to read but are al-

CRIME

Weak Case

WHEN Brigadier Jagir Singh (Retd) landed in Delhi by an Air-India flight from the United States last month and the alert customs nabbed him for concealing three revolvers and 450 cartridges in his luggage, the customs officials themselves had little idea of the furore that would follow. Within a day, intelligence sleuths had taken over and after continuous interrogation extracted the most plausible confession in the context of the surcharged atmosphere in Punjab. The brigadier, said their report, was part of a New York-based group that had hatched a conspiracy to kill top leaders like Mrs Gandhi, Longowal and Tohra.

A prosecution application on July 27 seeking 10 days police remand for the brigadier said: "He has confessed that subsequent to the army action in Punjab a conspiracy was hatched in India by Gopal Singh Gill, Lachman Singh Sirotia, Sukhjeet Singh and Jagir Singh to seek funds to smuggle arms and assassinate top leaders." As part of the conspiracy, he is believed to have gone to the United States and enlisted the services of 'willing partners'.

As conspiracies go, the revelations were shocking. But over a month after the brigadier's detention there is very little evidence to sustain them. In fact intelligence sources who conducted searches at the residence of the brigadier in Chandigarh admit that Jagir Singh was not connected with Bhindranwale, the Akalis or the SGPC. "He was acting out of a sense of outrage at the army action in the Golden Temple," claimed an intelligence official. But if the brigadier was acting out of conviction, he is anything but religious. Jagir Singh, last visited the Golden Temple in 1981.





Jagir Singh (right) and his arrest (below): questionable confession

The brigadier's quick confession was obtained by enthusiastic sleuths of the Delhi Special Branch. But he is believed to have told intelligence men in Chandigarh that he was forced to admit his involvement in a conspiracy under police pressure When he was brought to court on August 1, he told his counsel in the presence of an INDIA TODAY correspondent: "I am involved in a fabricated case. They say I wanted to kill the prime minister."

The brigadier's explanation for the three revolvers and the cartridges is contained in the statement he gave to the customs authorities. In his signed statement he told them that one revolver was for himself and the other two were for his relatives. He claimed that he could produce the licences later.

Authorities interrogating him now feel that two of the revolvers were given to him by his friends in the United States and the third was purchased by Singh himself. If revelations about Jagir Singh are true and the credibility of the intelligence agencies high enough, the secrecy would be understandable. But with serious doubts about the brigadier being a terrorist at all, the plea for secrecy may be viewed as an attempt to cover up the initial gaffe.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

lowed to use the basketball court in the jail. Directly over them looms the tall watch tower of the prison. Security is so tight that when some local papers carried stories about the detention of the terrorists in Ajmer, a jailor was summarily transferred out of the jail because he was suspected of leaking information.

Besides Sandhu, the only other notable detenu in jail is Brigadier Mahendar Singh, detained in Amritsar. Like many others, he has denied having any links with the terrorists. Most of the 443 people now in custody have reportedly taken the stand that they are only pilgrims who were caught in the cross-fire between the army and the terrorists. There is also speculation that the two dozen women believed to have been detained may be innocent. But officials plan to personally verify the antecedents of each person before they let anyone off.

Other things are bothering the CBI as well. Reports say that large funds are being raised to engage a battery of lawyers to fight for the detenus, which heralds a prolonged legal battle. Moreover, in spite of the trial being held in camera, some details are bound to filter out. A waging war case has been successfully tried only once—against freedom fighters before Independence. The CBI is worried that Khalistan protagonists may well bracket these terrorists with Bhagat Singh and Subhash Chandra Bose—and thus bestow on them the esteem given to the country's most respected freedom fighters.

—RAJU SANTHANAM

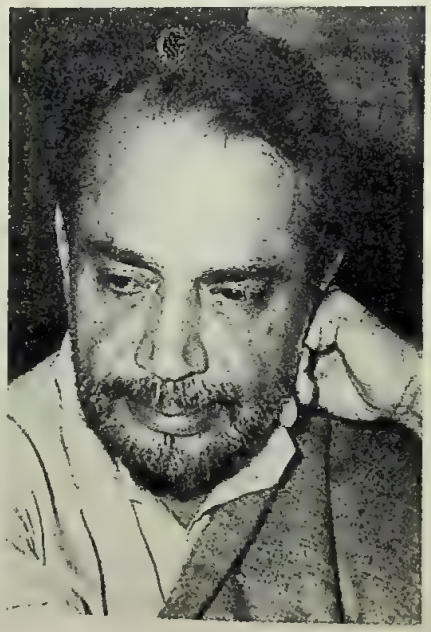
KARNATAKA

Shadow Boxing

KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has taken to making cabinet-level appointments with amazing prodigality. Last fortnight, when he made Janata MLA H. Kempe Gowda chairman of the Karnataka Road Transport Corporation, it was the 30th such appointment. In fact, even before the much-awaited expansion of his ministry takes place, it appears Hegde has a shadow cabinet of 30 colleagues enjoying the status of cabinet minister and another four that of the minister of state.

The appointments are an obvious bid to accommodate partymen clamouring for positions of importance as also to give Hegde a stronger hand in the reshuffling game. Last fortnight in a move to keep his party together the chief minister appointed three MLA's chairmen of state bodies. Besides Kempe Gowda, Obana Raju was given charge of the Karnataka Internal Fisheries Development Corporation and K.B. Mallapa the chairmanship of the Karnataka Cooperative Milk Producers Corporation. All three were from the 'group of 38' who had sought the mass resignations of Hegde's ministers and desired that he speed up the expansion process. Ten of the 38 MLA's are already chairmen of various state organisations.

But parties like the Karnataka Kranti Ranga should have no quarrel with Hegde for his largesse for he is following a precedent set by Devraj Urs. It was Urs who allowed the proliferation of state boards and corporations and institutionalised the appointment of non-officials, particularly legislators, to head them. Gundu Rao replaced many of Urs's men with his own. Hegde is now using the infrastructure built by them to further his own ends.



Hegde: accommodating bid

It was obvious that Hegde was stalling the process of expanding his ministry in order to accommodate more of his partymen in positions of power so that he would not have to deal with them later. With a tongue in the cheek, he told the press that he would wait till August 15, the date the Congress(I) had predicted his ministry would fall. "Why should I subject my ministers to the embarrassment of being in power for only a week if the prediction comes true ?" he asked.

There are many posts for Hegde to pacify his ambitious colleagues. These include positions in 978 committees, 529 of which need filling up; 145 state government undertakings, corporations and boards; and 28 commissions, town planning authorities and councils. Of the 59 boards and corporations under the state bureau of public enterprises, 38 are still headed by officials and provide scope for political appointments.

So far Hegde has appointed 37 legislators, including himself and five cabinet colleagues in various posts. In addition he has chosen 12 non-legislator MLA's to many governmental bodies, of which nine are Janata men and three from the BJP. However, state BJP President B.B.Shivappa says: "We are accused of grabbing so much but out of the six posts we sought we got only five. Now this is going to be further reduced to four when one of the corporations which is headed by our man is merged with another."

But a senior government official explains that to call these cabinet rank postings is incorrect. An official posting with cabinet rank means perks like a free car and telephone, house rent allowance of Rs 1,500 and city allowance of Rs 600. For a minister of state the allowances are less. But neither category of appointee is allowed to attend cabinet meetings or command any of the ministerial privileges.

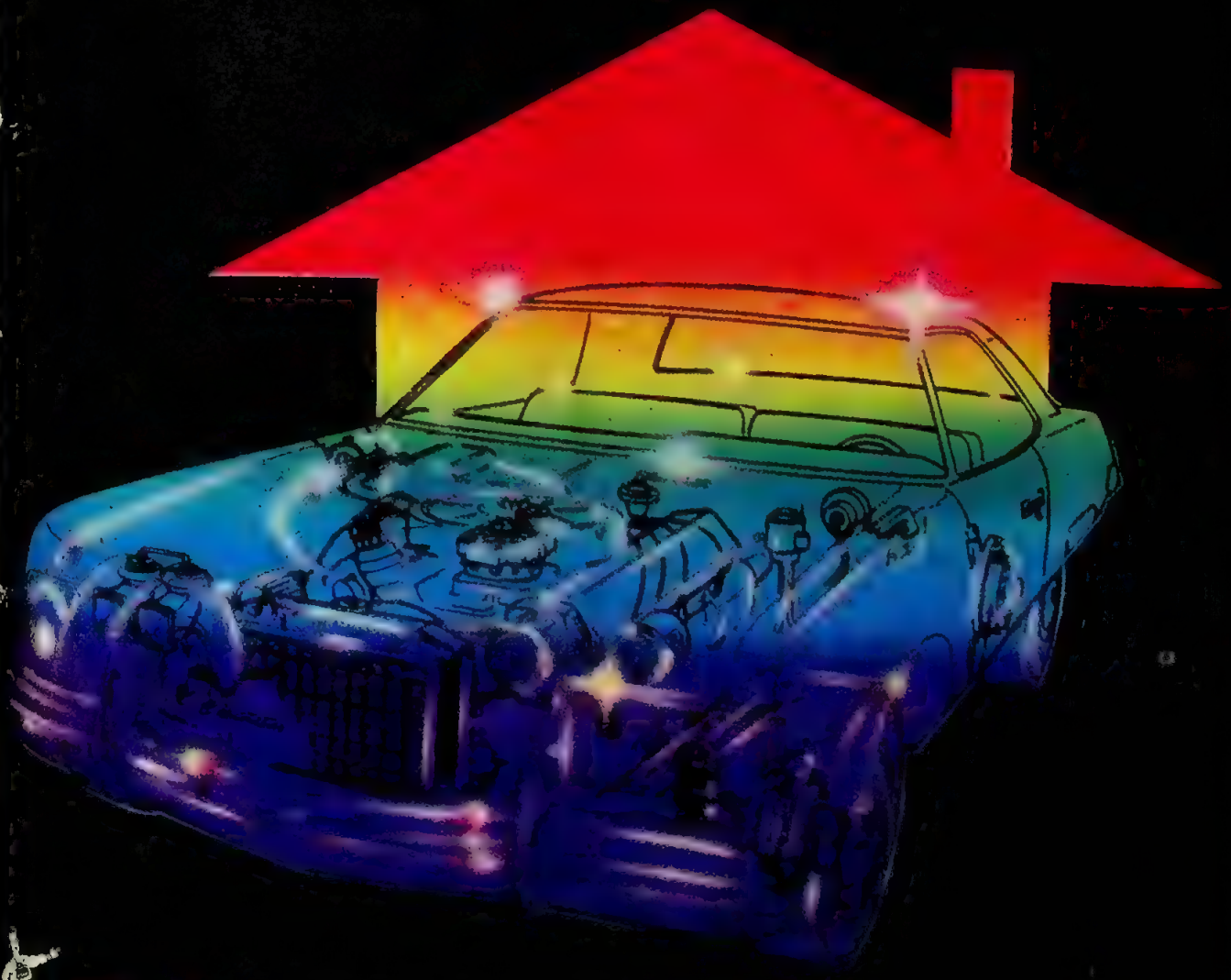
Even during Gundu Rao's time, some token representation was conceded to the Opposition. Hedge, however, has shut the door to appointments on the Congress(I) and Kranti Ranga. Complained the leader of the opposition in the Assembly, the Congress(I)'s Veerappa Moily: "Hedge has absolutely no courtesy to such a big party as the Congress(I). He has just ignored us. In a way it is beneficial to us. All this injustice is good for our electioneering purposes." Added leader of the opposition in the Upper House T. Narasimhamurthy: "At no time has Hegde taken the Opposition into confidence. Never have there been so many legislators heading government bodies."

Hegde himself has often admitted to excessive demands by his partymen for various posts and has complained of the difficulty in providing a part of the action to every clamouring individual. Though keeping partymen in positions of power is one way of ensuring that the Government's programmes are implemented Hegde also knows that it is a sure way of keeping his flock happy. Under great pressure, he has had to improve upon Urs' tactics. Whether the move is a winner will be known during the Lok Sabha elections, or earlier if the Congress(I) succeeds in its toppling bid.

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INDIAN SPORT

AN OLYMPIAN FIASCO





A funeral procession of dismal performances and a brief flicker of hope snuffed out by a microsecond. That, somewhat fittingly, summed up India's depressing display at Los Angeles last fortnight as yet another Olympic Games drifted by without the country figuring in the final medal tally.

In the end, it hardly seemed to matter that the flicker of hope emanated from a woman hurdler and not the highly-overrated hockey squad. Or that an overstuffed weight-lifter was disqualified and sent home in disgrace. For the millions of disappointed Indians who watched that pathetic parade straggle across their television screens, it was somehow all too symbolic of the sorry state of Indian sport, a final acceptance that, barring a miracle, Indian sport was on a downhill slide into the dark limbo of oblivion.

Disappointment, for well-wishers of Indian sport, has become an ingrained emotion. Yet, on this occasion, the disappointment was tinged with anger; anger at the invisible forces that prevent Indian sportsmen and women from clearing that final hurdle that seprates defeat from victory, a champion from the also-ran, a medal from a mere statistic.

The sense of frustration was all the more acute because of the hope and optimism generated over the the last three years when Indian sport seemed to be finally getting that long-awaited boost it so desperately needed. The 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi saw for the first time massive transfusions of money into sport and sporting facilities, an unprecedented import of foreign coaches and foreign equipment, and more important, a collective dedication and commitment on the part of the powers-that-be. The results were instant and astounding and India's outstanding performance at the Games (57 medals) seemed to indicate that Indian sport had finally come of age. But all that hope has been wiped out in one stroke by the Olympian fiasco last fortnight.

What crippling disease afflicts Indian sport? What is it that takes a hockey eleven to the pinnacle of success one minute, and the depths of ignominious defeat the next? What is it that makes athletes like Charles Borromeo and M.D. Valsamma show such potential one year, only to fade out the next? Which black hole exists in the Indian sporting firmament that swallows up sportsmen like one-time cycling hope Maxwell Trevor without leaving a trace? What is it that prevents a P.T. Usha from making that final lunge at the tape that means the difference between a medal and a fourth placing? There are plenty of answers and yet none at all. It was all really summed up by hockey star Vineet Kumar who, when asked what had gone wrong in Los Angeles, could only mumble: "*Kya batayen kya hua?*" (How do we describe what happened?)

The lament was rendered all the more piognant by the fact that the medal table at the end of the Games featured countries such as Iceland, the Ivory Coast and Zambia, to mention only a few. And yet, here was a country with 750 million people unable to produce the talent for even an Olympic bronze. The aberration defies all logic. India's neighbour China, with a slightly larger population, enters the Olympics for the first time in 30 years and takes home 32 medals, the fourth highest tally at Los Angeles. Third-placed Romania, a country of 22 million people, grabs 53 medals including 20 golds.

It is hardly surprising that hosts America, who virtually swamped the Olym-



pics, is currently experiencing a massive resurgence of patriotic fervour, of national pride, a collapse of social barriers. That is what a clutch of Olympic medals has the power to do.

Indian sport remains trapped in a vicious circle. A creditable haul at the Olympics would have produced a greater collective euphoria than the cricket World Cup win at Lord's. It would have brought on much the same symptoms being witnessed in America. Above all, it would have been boom time for Indian sport. There would have been an outpouring of generosity on the part of the Government as well as the public. In the schools, children would suddenly be inspired into sporting activity. However temporary the phase, that euphoria is the one thing that suddenly unites the country. That for one brief, shining moment, instils a rare feeling of pride and discipline. But that at the moment is hardly likely to occur if Indian sport continues to stagnate. Writes veteran commentator Melville De Mello: "Today, success of any kind is linked with national pride, esteem and superiority, physical and moral. While our 'way of life' has largely disappeared from our land, it has not been replaced by new attitudes prevalent in other parts of the world. How, then, do we produce champions? We must try and build the self-esteem of our athletes so that they get a positive image of themselves again and not a negative self-image."

INDIAN HOCKEY TEAM Olympic Title Holders Placed 5th

Statistically, the Indian performance at Los Angeles, with the sole exception of Usha, seems unexplainable. Borromeo's timing was as much as five whole seconds behind his best in the 800 metres. Javelin hope Gurtej Singh was an astonishing 6.66 metres behind his Asiad mark of 76.74 m. Chand Ram took 37 seconds longer to complete the 20-km walk than his 1:29:29 at the Asiad. Valsamma, the 400-metres hurdles gold medallist at the Asiad, clocked 60.03 seconds, over 20 metres behind her 57.7 at the trials and Asiad star Geeta Zutshi faded out of the Olympic reckoning even before she had started.

The same litany of loss of form was repeated at the shooting ranges where every Indian entrant performed way below his best, at the wrestling and weight-lifting arenas where one weightlifter, V. Manikyalu failed in all three of his attempts to lift 85 kg and had the ultimate mortification of scoring zero, and another, Kamal Kanta Santra was disqualified for being 2 kg overweight because, as his coach later claimed, he had eaten too much. The yachtmen and the two-member boxing squad fared no better either, finishing far behind in their events.

Even more deplorable—and avoidable—was the bungling and the bumbling that took place in the run-up to the Olympics. Sports Minister Buta Singh was entangled in the Punjab crisis and with no one at the helm, decisions, appointments and even selections were delayed to ridiculous degrees. The Indian contingent created their only bit of history at the Games by being the only contingent to arrive without a chef de mission. Incredibly, four successive nominees of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA)had turned down the post. The first, Minister of State for Defence, K.P. Singh Deo, was vetoed by Mrs Gandhi who required his services for the Punjab tangle. The second, navy chief Admiral O.S. Dawson was also turned down by the Indian Government.

The third, politician Lokpati Tripathi,

son of Congress(I) working President Kamalapati Tripathi, refused to go with the contingent though he went to Los Angeles anyway as an observer for the IOA. The fourth, air vice marshal C.L.Mehta, was approached when he was already in Los Angeles as a delegate for the Asian Olympic Association (IOA). He politely refused to take on an additional commitment. In desperation, the IOA finally had to ask Daya Singh Sandhu, the controversial manager of the shooting squad, to take over as acting chef de mission.His first act after his appointment was to send an urgent telex to the IOA office in New Delhi asking them to print 200 visiting cards with his new designation and have them rushed to the Olympic Village.

BUT CLEARLY, the official bungling and the fiasco at Los Angeles was no isolated event but just another manifestation of the perpetually murky state of Indian sport. Politics, bureaucratic interference, favouritism, short-sightedness and lack of direction have crippled Indian sport to a degree of hopelessness. As one national record holder, rejected at the selection trials, says scornfully: "In other countries, they encourage and motivate youngsters but here the entire system is loaded against you.If an athlete manages to do well it is only because the talent is strong enough to overcome the inherent hurdles. But sheer talent alone cannot win gold medals."

One victim of the cruel sports syndrome was P.T.Usha, the 20-year-old railway clerk, who was not even among the first batch of athletes selected. She was only included in the second batch announced just before the games which included the women's relay team.Ironically enough, Usha and the relay team went on to create a record by being the first women athletes from India to enter an Olympic final.

P.T.Usha was also a victim of officialdom's mysterious logic. A former national champion had offered to arrange for her to go to Germany for two or three months before the Olympics for competitive training.It would have given her the opportunity of competing against world class opposition and also given her invaluable experience in running strategy. For some inexplicable reason, the federation turned down the offer.

Tragically, the sole voice of protest was raised by former Olympic star Milkha Singh who resigned from the federation in protest against the appointment of J.S.



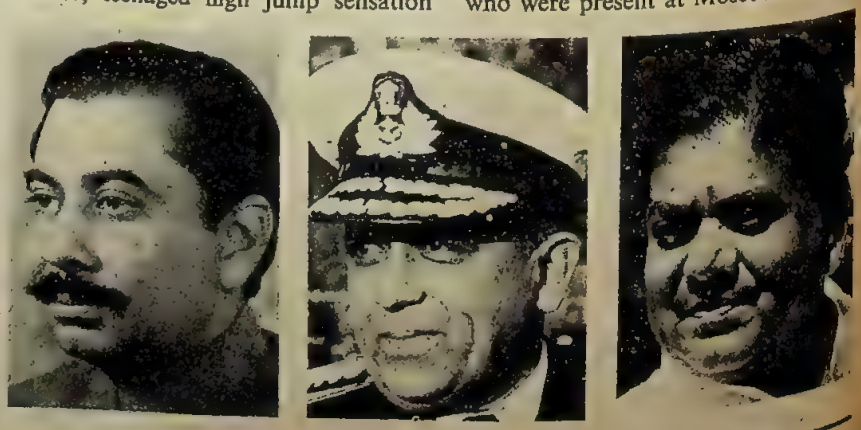
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

P.T. USHA
400 m hurdles
Placed 4th in finals

Saini as athletics coach." Why should the federation go on selecting a coach like Saini who has so little to show by way of achievement while ignoring the rightful claims of people like Kutty and Nambiar who have produced champions," he stormed.

Other selections were no less questionable.The federation selected as manager of the athletics contingent, V.K.Verma, who has had precious little to do with athletics.In fact, athletics captain Chand Ram, threatened to withdraw from the contingent on the grounds that coaches had been accommodated at the expense of promising athletes like miler Suresh Yadav, teenaged high jump sensation N.Annavi, 5,000m runner Raj Kumar and discus thrower Ajmer Singh, who is clearly the best in Asia. However, under pressure from his employers, the Indian Army, Ram was forced to withdraw his objections and apologise to the federation.

But the biggest scandal was easily in the farce played out at the shooting trials and selections as is evidenced by the fact that the Indian contingent contained eight athletes and seven shooters. It is well known that Indian marksmen represent the most influential lobby in sports and nothing demonstrated this more than the trials. Originally, it was decided that the qualifying mark would be the sixth best score at the Moscow Olympics.Later, it was suggested that the Moscow performances be considered after leaving out the Eastern Bloc countries as they were not participating at Los Angeles. The absurdity of this argument was obvious since it was mainly the Eastern Bloc countries who were present at Moscow.Then, the



(From left) Singh Deo, Dawson and Tripathi: musical chairs



M.D. VALSAMMA
400 m hurdles
Eliminated in heats



CHARLES BORROMEO
400 m
Eliminated in heats



GEETA ZUTSHI
400 m
Eliminated in heats

qualifying mark was again amended to the eighth position at Montreal, which was eight years ago. When shooter Harsimran Singh Sandhu still failed to qualify, the East European shooting marks were excluded from the Montreal results as well. Sandhu, not surprisingly, is the son of the Los Angeles chef de mission and shooting team manager, Daya Singh Sandhu who had quit the National Rifle Association of India some time back to float his own rival organisation. Significantly, in February, the Sports Ministry suddenly decided to withdraw its grants to the rifle association on the specious plea that there was mismanagement. They also refused the association permission to use the Tughlakabad ranges four days before the national shooting championships were to begin on March 19. Says association President Sajjan Singh Sethi: "What was the logic in withdrawing our grants suddenly on February 20 when we had received an instalment barely a month earlier? The whole campaign to run down the association was a big fraud designed to accommodate favourites for the trip to Los Angeles." That was patently obvious in the actual competition when Sandhu ended up 63rd in a field of 70 scoring 166 out of 200 as against his claimed performance of 191 at the trials. The other shooters also performed way below what they supposedly recorded at the trials.

The real irony lies with the IOA which, while failing to keep its own house in order, has been taking an exaggerated interest in the affairs of other sports federations, following the ignominious row in the hockey federation last year which saw federation president Inder Mohan Mahajan ousted and replaced temporarily by Raja Bhalinder Singh, president of the IOA. Similarly, the wrestling federation has been taken over by the IOA for all practical purposes. Not that it has managed to improve matters any since the wrestling trials proved nothing but a comic farce with officials coming to blows with one another and finally being made to take an oath of integrity and fairness.

Sadly, whatever the sport, the common sickness has become bureaucratic and political interference. Examples abound in plenty:

► Three ministers are in control of separate sports organisations, Buta Singh, Union sports minister, also heads the Amateur Athletic Federation. N.K.P.Salve is head of the Cricket Control Board and Vasant Sathe heads the Badminton Association of India.

► I.S.Bindra, joint secretary to the President of India, heads the Table Tennis Federation besides being the vice-president of the Cricket Control Board.

► Maharashtra political heavyweight Sharad Pawar is the president of the Kabaddi Federation of India.

► B.S. Ojha, a Haryana bureaucrat heads the Gymnastics Federation of India.

► Jamuwant Dhote, MP, heads the Judo Federation of India.

The state federations are even more crowded with politicians and bureaucrats, the prominent ones being Lokpati Tripathi in Uttar Pradesh, J.S.Gehlot in Rajasthan, Akali leader Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa in Punjab, Education Minister Shiv Kumar Singh in Himachal while the Karnataka Olympic Association is headed by F.M. Khan.

The reasons for the proliferation of politicians in the sporting arena are not far to seek. Apart from the acccompanying perks like foreign trips, it is an ideal platform from which to dispense favours and select their own candidates for national or state teams. Participation in a national event like the Ranji trophy entitles cricketers to a certificate stating they have played at the national level. This in turn entitles them to privileges like getting into medical colleges with only 50 per cent marks. This would be justified if the can-

Comparative Performances

Women	India	Asia	World
100m (sec)	11.8	11.00	10.88
200m (sec)	24.30	22.40	21.71
400m (sec)	54.99	51.20	47.99
800m (min:sec)	2:05.42	1:58.00	1:53.43
1500m (min:sec)	4:19.33	4:14.80	3:52.50
3000m (min:sec)	9:27.00	9:2.00	8:27.20
100m Hurdles (sec)	14.30	12.80	12.36
400m Hurdles (sec)	55.42	55.42	54.20
4 × 100m Relay (sec)	46.93	45.13	41.06
4 × 400m Relay (min:sec)	3:32.49	3:32.49	3:19.23
High Jump (m)	1.67	1.92	2.04
Long Jump (m)	6.26	6.44	7.09
Shot Put (m)	13.48	17.77	22.45
Discus Throw (m)	45.96	61.80	73.26
Javelin Throw (m)	47.38	60.52	72.00

Men			
100m (sec)	10.30	10.00	9.91
200m (sec)	20.80	20.60	19.72
400m (sec)	45.60	45.60	43.86
800m (min:sec)	1:45.70	1:45.70	1:41.72
1500m (min:sec)	3:43.70	3:38.20	3:31.40
5000m (min.:sec)	13:59.80	13:25.40	13:00.42
10000m (min:sec)	28:42.00	27:43.40	27:22.40
110m Hurdles (sec)	14.00	13.50	12.93
400m Hurdles (sec)	51.60	49.59	47.13
20km Walk (hr:min:sec)	1:27:57.60	1:27:57.60	1:20:58.60
Marathon (hr:min:sec)	2:11:59.20	2:09:05.60	2:08:13.00
4 × 100m Relay (sec)	40.30	39.54	37.80
4 × 400m Relay (sec)	3:08.20	3:06.50	2:56.16
High Jump (m)	2.12	2.39	2.39
Long Jump (m)	8.07	8.10	8.90
Pole Vault (m)	4.25	5.43	5.81
Triple Jump (m)	16.79	17.02	17.89
Shot Put (m)	18.66	18.66	22.15
Discus Throw (m)	58.74	61.66	71.16
Javelin Throw (m)	76.88	89.14	99.874
Hammer Throw (m)	65.76	71.14	81.80
Decathlon (pts)	7400	8089	8798

didates were genuine national-level cricketers. In many cases they are not. Says Gujarat MP and sports buff Jaideep Singh Baria, who has helped many sportsmen including Borromeo with financial help: "People who have nothing to do with sports head all the associations. All they do is indulge in constant lobbying and jockeying for free trips abroad. It is a mad scramble with all of them scratching each other's backs. The sportsmen are trapped in the middle."

The other area of neglect is the vital question of incentives. Barring cricket with its tradition of benefit matches and generous allowances, sportsmen who retire do so in dire financial straits. The current hockey and athletic stars are mostly employed by various private and public sector organisations at lowly-placed jobs and life for them is one constant struggle for survival. One glaring example is Shankar Laxman, India's greatest hockey goalkeeper, who now survives on Rs 800 a month.

With that kind of future ahead, most youngsters are naturally averse to taking to sports as a full-time career. In stark contrast, other countries, including China, offer all their athletes adequate incentives. In Los Angeles, members of the Chinese volleyball squad were promised video sets if they won the gold. They did. It is hardly surprising that in the West almost all the top sportsmen have become virtual millionaires following the relaxation of the rigid amateur athletics code by the Olympic Association.

In India, apart from the odd gesture of generosity by a chief minister or an industrialist, incentives are almost non-existent except in the rare euphoria of a World Cup win in cricket. In fact, whatever incentives there are in the form of appointments are often misplaced. One example was the Punjab government which made hockey wizard Balbir Singh director of sports with former soccer captain Jarnail Singh and Milkha Singh as his deputies. The sportsmen, entangled in the bureaucratic process that governs sports, soon fell out leaving the sports department in a shambles. At the same time, the country was deprived of the experience of three top-class sportsmen as coaches.

The result is that more and more sportsmen are going abroad as coaches or players. For example, volleyball star Jimmy George is making more money than he could ever hope to make in a lifetime of sport in India by signing up with an Italian club. Volleyballers Balwant Singh, Suresh Mitra and Abdul Basith have all migrated to West Asia, joining the increa-



HARSIMRAN SANDHU
Skeet shooting
63rd out of 70

singly long list of cricketers and hockey players who have taken up coaching assignments abroad.

THE ABSENCE of both good coaches and coaching facilities is one major factor keeping world standards tantalisingly out of the reach of Indian sportsmen. In India there is a strong lobby against the employment of foreign coaches even if the experience before the Asiad clearly proved that the modern methods of training used by them could improve results. But Indian coaches do not agree. Even when a majority of Indian athletes failed at Los Angeles, national track and field coach Saini pointed his finger accusingly at training methods abroad, saying, Borromeo performed badly because he was training in America. "I do not want to blame American training but he was out of our hands and he never came near his earlier timings. Geeta Zutshi was out of our control and she has been in the US even longer."

Such sparring apart, experts feel that while basic coaching should still be given by Indian coaches, it will be fruitful to import coaching talent from abroad for people aiming for victory at the highest level of competition. Says sports lover and former hockey federation president M.A.M. Ramaswami: "What is wrong if foreign coaches are invited to train our team in the art of goalkeeping and hitting penalty corners? European teams are vastly superior to us in both departments. Similarly, in events where India does not have any tradition of excellence, like swimming, boxing, basketball, shooting and equestrianism, there should be nothing wrong with hiring foreign coaches when even the Americans benefitted so much from the services of a Romanian gymnastics coach they hired four years ago.

The trouble is, even the Indian coaches could have produced better results by themselves if only they were better committed to sports. But, as a sports ministry official says, schools and colleges all over the country are full of coaches with nothing to show but a diploma from the NIS at the end of a nine-month course. "He is doing it for the 100-odd rupees he is getting and not for any commitment," says the official, adding somewhat philosophically, second-class coaches produce second-class sportsmen. Even veteran sportsmen point out that some of the country's best athletes, including Valsamma and Usha, have been trained by committed coaches lacking NIS diplomas.

The coaches, however, have their own set of grouses. The most prominent is obviously the lack of rewards. They point out that while abroad the status and prestige of the coach rises with that of the star he has created, in India not even a special promotion has been given to Desh Prem Azad, the NIS cricket coach whose nursery at Chandigarh produced Kapil Dev and now his likely new ball partner Chetan Sharma.

The coaches' second and more genuine complaint is of the lack of sophisticated infrastructure needed to hone sportsmen for international competition. Says Baria: "We always keep looking for the world hockey crown. Does someone realise that this big country has just one sports field with astro-turf, at Delhi? True the team can play here during training but all through the year players use only natural turf all round the country. The coaches can thus hardly be expected to shape their approach to the game according to the requirements of synthetic turf.

Similarly, the country has just a handful of high jump foam-pits, each one of which will cost less than Rs 1 lakh. Experts point out that the art of the Fosbury flop that added inches to high jumps over two decades ago has yet to come to India. This is because jumpers play it safe with the traditional style. Even Tamil Nadu's Annavi has been using the old style and began to learn the Fosbury flop only after he came into the limelight after breaking the national record and attending the coaching camp for the Olympics.

The plight of wrestling is even more miserable. The country has hardly half-a-dozen proper wrestling mats and most of our wrestlers are even now brought up on the loose sands of the traditional *akhara*. Says National Democratic Alliance General Secretary and sport aficionado Vijay Kumar Malhotra: "From my experience I can tell you anyone brought



(From left) Buta Singh, Sathe and Salve: political domination of sports



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

CHAND RAM
20 km walk
22nd out of 38

up in the *akhara* can never win at world level on the mat. The two techniques are so completely different. Chandgi Ram, Maruti Mane, Satpal—all our best heavyweight wrestlers have suffered on this account. There can be no medals in wrestling till we at least have mats all over. And it does not cost too much." Incidentally, it was due to the non-availability of good cushions that 17-year-old gymnast Mohinder Singh Chhabra fell to his death at the NIS, Patiala, while performing a double somersault on the roman rings. The pole vault is another case in point. When the fibreglass pole came into use all over the world, Indian athletes were still in the bamboo age. Now, when the world is using a flexible pole made of special alloys, Indians are resigned to using fibre glass for many years.

While it is often suggested that things should have improved after the addition of all the Asiad infrastructure, the fact remains that it has made a difference only in Delhi. Most schools and colleges in the rest of the country still do not have a playground. As former Asian 400 metres champion Kanwaljit Sandhu and her husband Hardyal Singh, both NIS coaches, say: "The problem is we want to have a bagful of medals without school playgrounds and equipment." In this context, Milkha Singh's suggestion that the NIS be shifted to Delhi where all the modern Asiad facilities could be utilised deserves consideration.

THE CRUELEST irony is that while the country is so terribly short of playgrounds and infrastructure, petty officials and bureaucrats still get away with extravaganzas to satiate their whims. The most glaring example was the building of the Wankhede Stadium just a hundred metres as the crow flies from the old Brabourne Stadium in Bombay and the construction of a second massive cricket stadium near Ahmedabad by the Gujarat Cricket Association after it had a row with the Gujarat Sports Association which controlled the existing stadium. Another glaring example of wastefulness is the large Sardar Patel Stadium near the race course in Bombay. Built over two decades ago, with excellent facilities, including a cycling track and a capacity of 15,000, it lies today in a state of total disrepair—useful for only music shows.

An Indian sportsman also begins with obvious psychological disadvantages. Till the moment he gets aboard the aircraft, his fate hangs by the slender thread of bureaucratic whim and fancy.

P.T. USHA

High Hopes

THE GLOOM that pervaded the whole country last fortnight was felt most palpably at Payyoli, a small village 40 km north of the trading town of Calicut in Kerala. Outside a textile shop sat a stricken E.P.M. Paithal with dozens of villagers trying vainly to comfort him. Paithal was not exactly grieved. He was just confused. He did not know whether to celebrate or grieve at the news he had just received.

Even if it was the best an Indian woman ever achieved in the field of sport, a fourth position at the Olympics was not going to satisfy the father of Pilavullakandi Thekeparampil Usha, the 5'7 (169 cm) hurdle queen who has made it a habit of treating all athletic records with disdain. Said Paithal in a choked voice: "We expected her to win at least a bronze. It was a case of so near and yet so far."

At the Thrikottur school where Usha studied and began her athletic career, youngsters now run around pretending to be Usha who had become a legend for them much before she hit the world headlines last fortnight. And in the school it is impossible to miss the proud face of physical training instructor Balakrishnan Nair, who claims the credit for having first spotted Usha in a school tournament when she was [illegible] nine. He later sent her to the Cannanore Sports School in 1977 and Usha never looked back. When she was only [illegible] and in fourth standard, he recalls nostalgically, she defeated a 14-year-old girl to win the 100 metres. And since then there has been no stopping her."

At Cannanore, came the turning point in Usha's career when she met coach Nambiar. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship, the kind seldom seen in the world of Indian sport, even leading the US press to make wild speculation about the live-in twosome. Nambiar, however, says he treats Usha like his fifth child. Says her father Paithal: "It is like a father-daughter relationship." Nambiar lives 5 km away, across the river. Every morning at 5.30 as soon as she heard the sound of Nambiar's motorcycle Usha would race to the high school ground or to the beach after just a cup of black coffee. She would come back after two hours thoroughly exhausted and would lie flat on the cement floor. Nambiar is looked upon with respect and awe by the whole family. Says sister Pushpa: "Nambiar sir is very firm on daily exercises as he says that this will give Usha enough stamina and strength for the final burst in any kind of race."

A clerk at the Calicut railway station, Usha lives in a modest house called Pradeepalayam with two, [illegible] tale models of Appu hanging in the verandah outside. For the family, belonging to a poor weavers' community, Usha's success has been nothing

Usha's parents in front of their house in Payyoli

SREEDHAR PILLAI



short of dazzling. Said her mother Lakshmi Amma who spent long nights praying to Lord Krishna of Guruvayoor for her victory: "I am sure at the Seoul Olympics in 1988 Lord Krishna will bless her with a medal." She points proudly at the showcase full of medals and trophies and also the family's prized possession: a framed photograph of an 11-year-old Usha, a skinny lass in a white vest, holding the first cup she won at an inter-school meet. She adds: The only thing missing here is an Olympic medal."

Always game for the most exacting training schedules, Usha has consistently subjected her body to physical hardship. The gain is there on her success graph for anyone to see. Beginning with some sensational sprinting in the under-sixteen category, she bagged the 100 and 200 metres sprint golds at Bangalore in 1981. Recalls veteran coach A.B. Krishnaswamy: "She came off the starting blocks to a perfect start and it appeared as if she had come out of the starter's pistol." She posted recorded time for both sprints: 11.8 and 24.7 seconds. But the strain of her back-breaking training regimen soon put her out of action with puzzling illness in which her heart valves seemed to be blocked. For a while it looked like the end of the track.

But after three months of rest and a fitness certificate from eminent cardiologist Dr Valiyathan, Usha returned to the track in January 1982. She failed to improve her earlier timings. But that was still good enough to put her on the victory stand before her home crowds at the Calicut national meet. Disappointments followed at the Asiad, when Usha had to be content with two silvers, losing out to Filipino pop star Lydia de Vega in 100 metres and Hiromi Isozaki in 200 metres. Undaunted, Nambiar now decided his ward was more suited for 400 metres. Said he: "Systematic weight training has strengthened her knees, helping her to acquire a higher knee action. With a better stride she has a future in 400 metres."

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



Usha and coach Nambiar: perfect understanding

He was proved right as, at the subsequent nationals at Jamshedpur in September 1983, Usha rewrote not only the 100 and 200, but also the 400 metres record. She followed it up with the 400 metres gold at the Asian track and field championship in Kuwait. Nambiar now decided that he could exploit Usha's talent better in the 400 metres hurdles. Many sport scribes had dismissed him as "a wild dreamer" when he first stated that she could reach the Los Angeles finals in the event. But Nambiar proved he was on the right track as, at the Sebastian Coe-Steve Ovett like competition at Bombay, Usha won the battle of the hurdles, clocking 58.5 seconds. Valsamma's Asiad record of 58.48 still remained unchanged.

It did not last very long. Usha went from stride to stride, returning a remarkable 55.7 at the Olympic trials, placing her firmly among medal prospects and her record of the four races she ran in Los Angeles speaks for itself—55.88 on July 25 at trials before the games began; 56.84 in the first heat; 55.54 to win the semi-finals and 55.42 at the finals. International athletics experts feel that with good training and a bit of luck, a consistenly improving athlete like Usha can hope to reach somewhere near the world mark of 54.2 in a year or so.

The rise of Usha is also part of a growing Kerala presence on the Indian sports horizon. Usha, Valsamma and Shiny Abraham join a long, imposing list of athletics champions from Kerala that begins with T.C. Yohannan and Suresh Babu. The Government encourages sportsmen to the extent of awarding them grace marks in examinations. The Christian educational institutions also lay great stress on sports. In the Government, there are jobs aplenty for sportsmen. Says T.V. Madhusoodanan, inspector general of police: "Namakuzhi High School near Kottayam had the best women's volleyball team in the state. But none of the girls passed in examinations. So we employed all of them as constables." The Kerala Government also gave fat cash awards to all medal winners from the state at the Asiad. The system of incentives has worked well and largely accounts for the state's domination over the rest of the country in the field of sport.

For the moment, it seems, all other stars have faded in comparison with Usha. At Payyoli, everyone anxiously awaits her arrival, particularly her family which expects her to bring home a colour TV so they can watch her exploits at Seoul. Says Lakshmi Amma: "Her burning ambition is to get an Olympic medal. So there is no question of marriage for her till she gets one at Seoul." For the self-effacing, skinny country lass who has left a series of glorious footprints from the lonely beach in her village to the tartan track at the Los Angeles coliseum, that should be a tempting addition to an already burgeoning bag of incentives.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Payyoli
with AMARNATH K. MENON

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Normally (as happened in the case of the Los Angeles contingent as well), the team is provisionally selected just a month or so before the event, awaiting the Sports Ministry's clearance. It comes only a week or so before the team's departure. Then each sportsman has to immediately gather money to pay for his expenses. While the Government denied this in Parliament last fortnight, the fact remains that the employers of the Los Angeles-bound sportsmen were made to shell out their complete expenses.

The identical letters written by the various federations to players' employers gave the break-up of the expenses as: "Contribution to IOA: Rs 12,012; ceremonial kit: Rs 1,500; excess baggage: Rs 500; out of pocket allowance: Rs 2,860 airport tax: Rs 100; TP(presumably transport), medicines and miscellaneous: Rs 500." This adds up to Rs 17,472. As if to add insult to injury the letter also went on to say that "the above amount may be sent

SAI

Catch'em Young

IN A ROW of rooms in the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, a retired major-general and a bunch of officials are giving final touches to what may become the blueprint of India's sports revival or, if executed ham-handedly, as another of the familiar sports fiascos, sinking hundreds of crores of rupees. But Major-General Narinder Singh, formerly chief of the NCC, and his men, drawn mainly from the Asian Games Special Organising Committee secretariat, say they are trying hard to change things.

In the mood of rethinking that set in in the wake of the Asiad, the Government decided to follow up the formation of the Sports Ministry with the setting up of Sports Authority of India (SAI), an autonomous body to give direction to the entire gamut of sporting activity—talent-spotting, training, incentives and the organisation of tournaments. The objective was not just to replace the All India Council of Sports (AICS) but to create a new, powerful body which would have its way with the often obstinate sports federations. The Authority was allocated Rs 450 crore in the seventh plan. In a tentative scheme submitted to the Planning Commission, the Authority proposed to spend a bulk of this money on building up a sport infrastructure in the country.

This will include:

- Building sports recreation centres in metropolitan centres at a cost of Rs 80-100 crore.
- Capital investment on sporting equipment: Rs 5 crore.
- Adoption of selected schools all over the country for the allocation of building playgrounds and swimming pools: Rs 6.64 crore.
- Organisation of a national physical fitness festival at each state capital every year: Rs 6.25 crore.
- Grants for holding international sports meets in India: Rs 12.15 crore.
- Creation of a national sportsmen's welfare fund: Rs 1 crore.
- Organisation of rural sports meets all over the country: Rs 20 crore.
- Sport scholarships to talented youngsters: Rs 6.48 crore.



SAI's races at Nehru Stadium: positive plans

The Sports Authority spokesmen say the objective is not to usurp the role and authority of the sports federations but only to assist them with expertise and funds. As a beginning, they say, the Authority is planning to take over the training of the Indian probables for the 1986 Asiad and the 1988 Olympics. The Authority is also planning to initiate a large number of regular physical fitness festivals for people in the 35-plus age group all over the country. Similar festivals are being organised for children and if the response to the Authority's monsoon races at the Nehru Stadium is something to go by, these could prove extremely popular.

But, with the organisation still in its infancy, sceptics have already begun having doubts. Most sports federations fear that the organisation has been created specifically to loosen their grip on their respective sports. At least two of them, the Badminton Association of India and the Archery Federation have already written to the Authority alleging poaching on their domain. Says Archery Association President Vijay Kumar Malhotra: "The Sports Authority's decision to organise junior and sub-junior tournaments is nothing short of interference in our functioning." The Sports Authority spokesmen explain that they are only organising a series of contests as part of their national sports talent search programme. Spokesmen of the federations, however, allege that this is merely the beginning.

Sportsmen, too, look at the new body with optimism. Most feel they have little to lose, and they couldn't care less if it upsets the federations. On the other hand, if this turns out to be another high-handed bureaucratic body, it still couldn't be worse than the federations. But, if in spite of the prime minister's direct patronage and Rs 450 crore in its kitty, the Sports Authority of India fails to live up to its promise, it will be a setback from which Indian sport will take years recovering.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA



through a bank draft by return post as the team is scheduled to leave within five days. This left the sportsmen in a desperate rush to collect money in time rather than prepare physically and psychologically for the contest ahead.

"This", says Malhotra, "is the most demeaning experience for the sportsman who has to go round begging, looking for benevolence, in case he does not have rich employers." Besides, he adds: "Once a sportsman takes favours he is loaded with requests to bring in gifts and do shopping on behalf of the benefactors. So the moment he lands abroad his first concern is to collect foreign exchange and go shopping." Malhotra, having been chef de mission with the 1978 Asiad contingent, should know.

This uncertainty and humiliation adds to the Indian sportsman's inbuilt inferiority complex while facing worthier opponents in an environment that he finds alien. Malhotra describes from experience the regular phenomenon of officials going around collecting gifts from other contingents. This does not exactly add to the morale of the team already envious of their more affluent counterparts. With all this behind, and very few prospects ahead, there is very little to psychologically spur an Indian athlete to try and cover that all-important, extra one-hundredth of a second.

Another glaring example of wastefulness is the large Sardar Patel Stadium in Bombay built over two decades ago with excellent facilities, including a cycle track and a capacity of 15,000. Today it lies in a state of total disrepair.

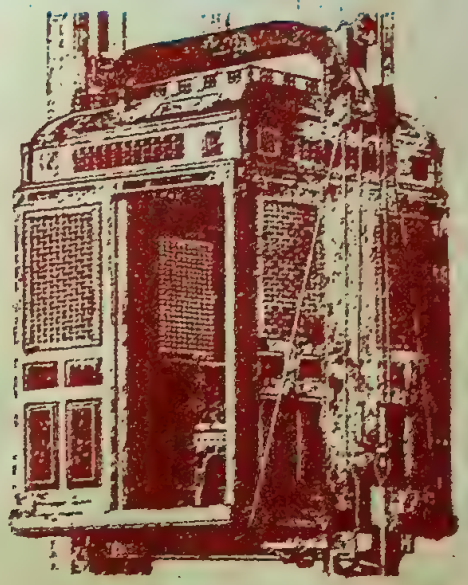
Besides these, there are other fundamental problems of diet and physical build. The typical Indian diet includes a lot of foodgrain which brings in plenty of carbohydrates but not enough protein. Indian badminton star Prakash Padukone was told this in as many words when he went to Europe for training and was badgered by the coaches there to turn non-vegetarian. He ultimately yielded and now admits to having benefitted in terms of physical endurance.

Another basic lack is the Indians' disinclination to take risks, as an injury will not just throw a player out of the game, it will also rob him of his livelihood. Absence of proper sports medical facilities does not help. The fate of star long jumper T.C. Yohannan who fell by the wayside after a knee injury aggravated due to faulty medical treatment is a case in point.

Ultimately, however, the most vital element missing from Indian sport is commitment. On the part of the Government. On the part of the officials who operate the levers on its behalf. And, more important, on the part of an indifferent Indian public. Neither is sport capable of flourishing in the current culture of sycophancy, of hand-outs, and of government control. That was symbolised at its basest form during the Asiad when gold medallist Chand Ram was physically propelled toward Rajiv Gandhi and told to touch his feet. The day that Indian sport truly comes of age will be when that kind of demeaning gesture that is all too symbolic of the political domination of sport is first removed

—DILIP BOBB and SHEKHAR GUPTA
with JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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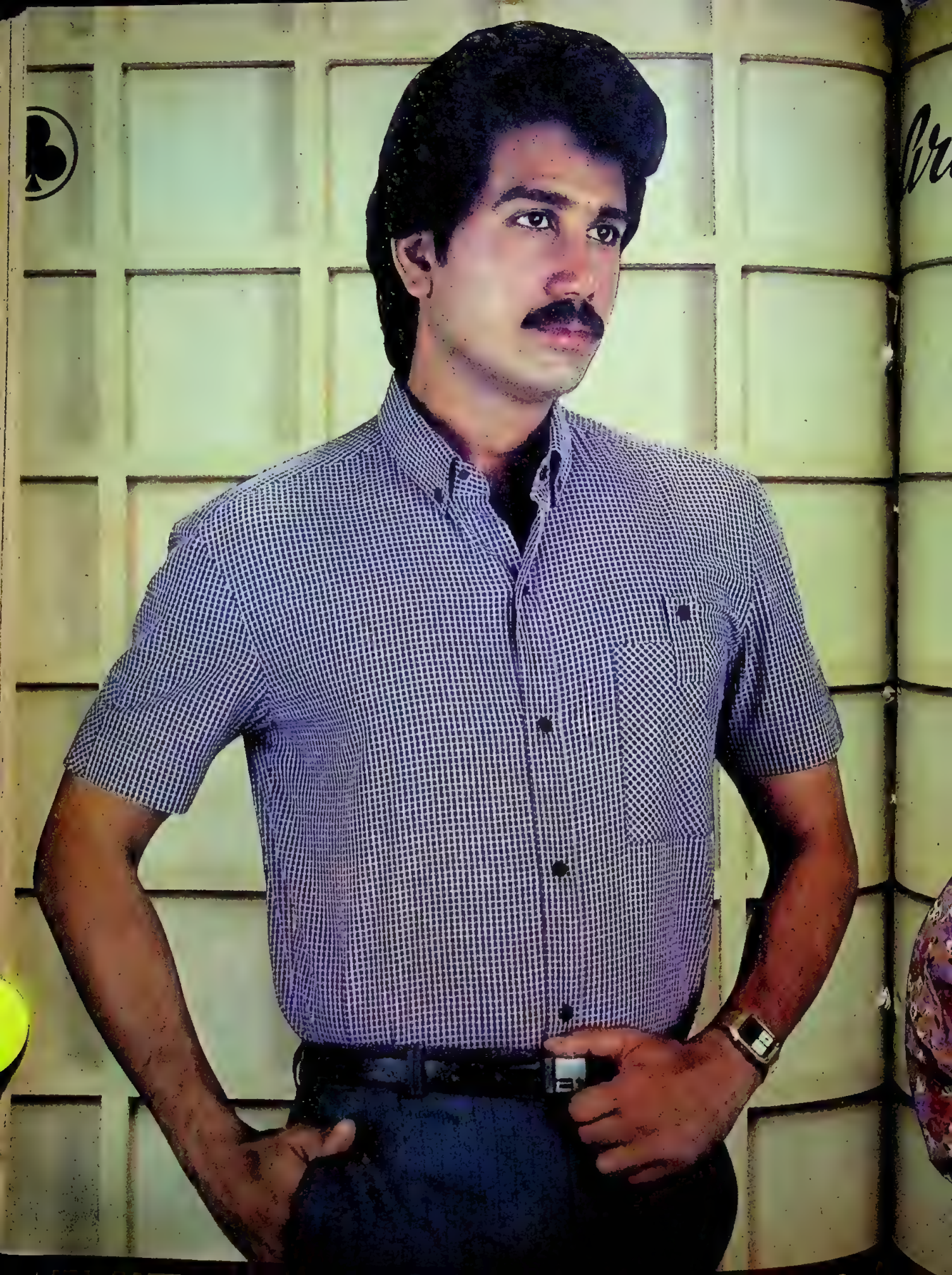
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SRI LANKA

A Dangerous Option



WHEN the separatist guerrillas made three daring strikes in different parts of the peninsula on August 8, the Minister of Security, Lalith Athulathmudali, said: "This is the long-awaited offensive." Only three days before following fierce clashes between the separatist rebels and government forces, he had smugly remarked that: "The situation in the north is completely under control."

From mid-July both the Government and the average Sri Lankan had been prepared for dramatic retaliatory attacks to mark the anniversary of last year's vicious anti-Tamil violence. But nobody knew what form such reprisals would take. Athulathmudali himself said that the terrorists had warned the Government they would kill 51 service personnel." The significance of that odd figure was not lost on anyone in Colombo. On July 23 last year, 51 Tamil prisoners in Colombo's maximum security jail had been slaughtered by fellow prisoners. The grim memories of 'Black July' still frighteningly fresh, it was precisely the kind of retaliation which Colombo dreaded most. The death of 13 Sinhalese soldiers in an expertly planned ambush had sparked off massive mob violence last time and a dangerous breakdown of discipline in the lower ranks of the army. When the week ended, Colombo got back to business as usual with a self-assurance that proved premature.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) drew comfort from another source. "The TULF is finished," claimed cabinet spokesman Dr Anandatissa de Alwis. The Tamil United Liberation Front had organised its own Gandhian 'prayers and protest' fast to mourn and honour the innocent Tamils dead in last year's riots. But the young men in Jaffna, now described as 'our boys' by the peninsular community had other plans. They came as usual on bicycles, mocked the TULF leaders, engaged them in open argument and succeeded in disrupting the TULF satyagraha. Front leader Amirthalingam denied this: "We ended our fast earlier than planned and that was all."

The UNP leaders and the media, especially the Sinhalese press, saw an encouraging turn of events. Before the satyagraha dispersed, several Front stalwarts like M. Sivasithamparam, the party president, and Sambandan, former MP, made speeches in which they freely admitted that "the leadership of the Tamil resistance lies in the hands of the Tamil youth". Obviously the young militants had wrested the initiative from the TULF which had clearly lost its moral authority over the Jaffna Tamils. The UNP gloated over its own reading of the situation as the TULF's 'debacle' (some called it 'demise').

The Front has dominated the electoral politics of the north for decades. In 1977 Amirthalingam became the Opposition leader, an office that gave him cabinet rank and diplomatic recognition abroad.

BHAWAN SINGH



This is the long-awaited offensive.

—LALITH ATHULATHMUDALI Security Minister

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Thus it was able to win international legitimacy for the Tamil cause. Particularly after the world-wide impact of last year's violence, it gained much sympathy and support in those western countries which are Sri Lanka's donors. The diplomatic pressure from these countries for a 'political settlement' gave the Tamil Front an additional dimension—negotiating power. It also gave India an opportunity, as Colombo saw it, to use the authentic representatives of the Tamils as an instrument of New Delhi's policy on the Tamil issue.

If the Tamils had lost confidence in the Front, with whom was the Government to negotiate ? With the terrorists ? Such questions led to the comforting conclusion that the pressure for negotiations would ease to allow more time and energy to be spent on tackling the main problem of terrorism. Such a shift of emphasis from the 'political' to the 'military' would certainly stiffen the morale of the Sinhalese and allay any fears entertained of a regime under pressure conceding too much to the Tamils. This logic would hold true especially if the counter-insurgency campaign produced obvious successes on the ground. Only a few opposition figures and some independent analysts took the trouble to warn the regime of the dangers of gloating over the Front's 'debacle', even if it were true. "If the TULF is finished," said a commentator, "then so is the non-violent, democratic option".

And then the bomb ripped through the Madras airport building. As the death toll rose, hour by hour, it dawned on a dazed Sri Lankan public that the bombs were meant for Colombo airport and Air Lanka planes on the tarmac if only the meticulously planned operation had not gone awry. Sri Lanka seemed to have been saved by its benign deities.

Premier Premadasa who has been needling Delhi with nagging consistency called for a joint Indo-Sri Lankan investigation while reminding India that the menace of Tamil terrorism was now a problem for both countries.

Then came the rebel 'offensive' whose intensity and audacity took most Sri Lankans by surprise. Diplomats also observed that the attacks across the whole peninsula were sustained over five consecutive days and involved armed groups sometimes numbering over 50 in one raid. And the casualties included police, navy and army personnel. A superintendent of police in Vavuniya was killed by a bomb planted in his office. The Government claims 72 terrorists dead as 'the war' begins to get really serious.

—MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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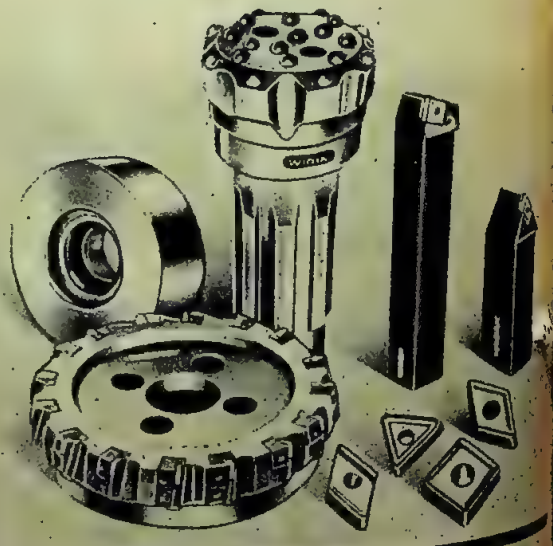
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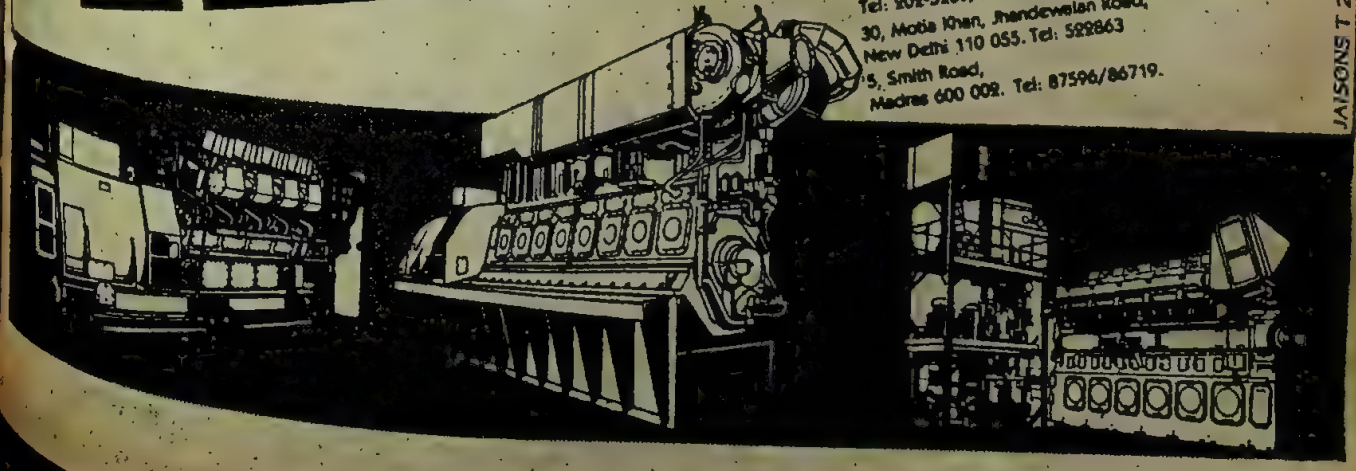
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DOORDARSHAN

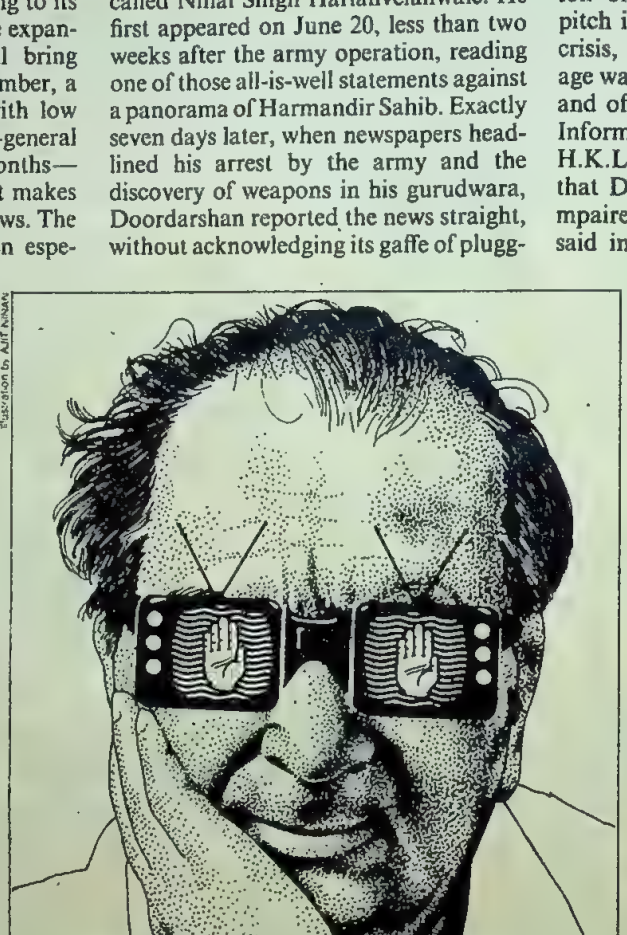
A Blurred View

FALLING credibility owing to its Punjab coverage, a massive expansion programme that will bring television to 180 towns by November, a high-minded new soap opera with low connections and a director-general at last after five headless months—Doordarshan is the network that makes news rather than gives you the news. The last couple of months have been especially hard for the Government's monopoly media which on the one hand will be connected by satellite link to cover 70 per cent of the country's population by year's end, but on the other hand cannot convincingly compose, report or present an ordinary news bulletin.

Having started with a clean slate after a competent coverage of the Asian Games in 1982 and built up with successful sponsored programmes through last year, Doordarshan has now blotted its copybook badly. Its Punjab reporting unfolded with a disregard for the realities of the situation, so grim, it almost paralleled the actual trauma. While senior Information and Broadcasting (I & B) officials dispute this by claiming that, when in May they commissioned an independent marketing research organisation to assess its credibility the answer was an emphatic yes, most independent media professionals are now inclined to agree that such a result was severely impaired in the post-Bluestar period. Harish Khanna, the 59-year-old director-general who took charge on July 1 after completing an innings as vice-chairman of the Delhi Development Authority says that the idea "was to air controversy about Punjab gradually".

But even he is hard-pressed to answer some of the bizarre anomalies that continue to creep into any airing of Punjab news on public television. This is best demonstrated by the appearance, disappearance and reappearance from Doordarshan's screen of a Nihang leader called Nihal Singh Harianvelanwale. He first appeared on June 20, less than two weeks after the army operation, reading one of those all-is-well statements against a panorama of Harmandir Sahib. Exactly seven days later, when newspapers headlined his arrest by the army and the discovery of weapons in his gurudwara, Doordarshan reported the news straight, without acknowledging its gaffe of plugging the leader. But some three weeks later when Baba Santa Singh began his famous "kar sewa" at the Golden Temple and Doordarshan showed a report, Harianvelanwale was back on the screen again.

For observers of the Punjab situation, the coverage bordered on farce; for the general viewing public, especially in the troubled state, the lack of information and slant of opinion, only heightened the trauma. As Doordarshan's mindlessly repeatist visuals, black-outs of information such as the full extent of damage to the Golden Temple complex or views of dissenting Sikhs and misplaced promotion of communal harmony grew to a pitch in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, opinion of Doordarshan's coverage was divided between political leaders and officials responsible for planning it. Information & Broadcasting Minister H.K.L. Bhagat, for one, was insistent that Doordarshan's credibility was unimpaired. "That may be your feeling," he said in irritation, "but not the general feeling. It is widely felt in the country that Doordarshan did a tremendous job in Punjab. Hundreds of people have written to me to say that we have done a great service by giving the correct picture."



I & B Minister H.K.L. Bhagat's irrational championing of Doordarshan isn't just defensive. It is simply short-sighted.

I & B Secretary S.S. Gill however made no effort to mince words in explaining the basis on which policy was framed: "Our accent as a national media is nation first, not news first." In spite of the fact that Bhagat summoned an informal "media command" comprising senior I & B and External Affairs Ministry officials and 1 Safdarjung Road confidants, Rajya Sabha member Arun Singh and advertising executive Romi Chopra, the policy-makers clearly fell short of their task.

"That," admits Arun Singh, "is because Doordarshan has neither the innovative camera-work nor the production skill to create reports that look as if a journalist was looking through the eyes of a camera. Its coverage tends to look like a visual version of AIR news. It's because Doordarshan doesn't function like a news-oriented network." And Khanna feels that "television is nothing if not a matter of leadership and co-ordination," thereby implying that Doordarshan suffered reverses because of lack of both.

It is not only the Government's shifting stands that make consistent news coverage impossible for Doordarshan (example: Punjab) or lack of detailed advance planning and coordination (example: Olympics) that make it lack-

...ature, its overzealous efforts at towing the ruling party line actually end up having the opposite effect. While at all times the prime minister has stressed that the army action in Amritsar does not reflect the Government's stand against the Akalis or Sikhs, it is interesting to note how subtly Doordarshan confused terrorists for Akalis and all Sikhs for Akalis. In a programme last month on reactions to the White Paper, one interviewee's denunciation of the terrorists was allowed to encompass Akali leaders and the Sikh community as a whole. Noting this, media columnist Iqbal Malik, himself a former deputy director general of Doordarshan, says: "It's not just counterproductive, it's inflammatory."

I & B Minister Bhagat does not agree. He admits to few mistakes. "What is wrong with Harianvelanwale's statement and subsequent arrest?" he asks. "He gave a statement so Doordarshan put it out. When he was arrested we also reported. It is a question of whether we reported correctly or not. We reported his statement and arrest." Bhagat's irrational championing of Doordarshan isn't just defensive. It is simply short-sighted. Especially as he insists that he had informally consulted hundreds of people, MP's officials, non-officials and intellectuals for their opinion on how to cover Punjab.

Opposition leaders fear that such an attitude may permeate coverage of the coming general election, on the expanded network which is costing the Government Rs 6.8 crore. Says BJP MP L.K. Advani, who has made a representation to the Election Commission requesting a regular monitoring of election campaign broadcasts on television: "Only the Government's perception of events in Punjab has been projected, exactly as in the White Paper."

Beside Doordarshan's expansion programme through low-power relay stations to encompass nearly three-quarters of the country, some other proposals to be taken up immediately are:

► A second channel for New Delhi, beginning on September 15. The two-hour evening transmission daily will pro-

OLYMPIC COVERAGE

A Late Start

DOORDARSHAN'S coverage of the Olympics in Los Angeles is marked by the same fumbling air of ad hocism that permeates its general programming policy—lack of planning, coordination and presentation. To begin with, Doordarshan wasn't even sure it would be able to telecast any live broadcasts of either the opening and closing ceremonies or the five hockey matches in the pool till the very last.

Its only planning of Olympic coverage for over a year consisted of nightly two-hour highlights it had undertaken to bid as part of an eight-nation pool under the auspices of the Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU). Although it had expressed keenness along with Pakistan to cover the hockey matches live, "We simply did not know what the outcome would be because all satellite links had been booked by the top international TV networks as much as three years in advance," says a Doordarshan official. The same was the case for the opening and closing ceremonies.

It was only days before the games were to start, that union trouble at ITV, the British network, forced it to sell some of its satellite bookings to Doordarshan. Together with last minute space made available by the international TV news agency Visnews, Doordarshan was able to telecast the programmes live via the Pacific-Indian Ocean satellite or the Atlantic-Indian Ocean satellite. These were obtained by payment in hard currency of anywhere between US $7,000 and US $8,000 per telecast. In addition, Doordarshan had to pay the Indian Overseas Communication Service (OCS) international rates for "downlinking" the telecasts.

Lack of anticipation and detailed planning further plagued the presentation of the television highlights and radio commentaries, for which Doordarshan paid ABU US $28,000 on a cost-sharing basis with seven other Asian countries that included Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Since ABU took the programmes from TV networks of Hong Kong and New Zealand who had sent their production teams to the games, Doordarshan paid another US $24,885 to the net works as its contribution towards production costs. Still, irate viewers felt that the punch was gone from the nightly telecasts due to the three breaks totalling 55 minutes that interrupted the highlights. While the break for news in English and Hindi was understandable, the third 15-minute break filled with dance and music programmes seemed absurdly misplaced.

Doordarshan made virtually no arrangements for coverage of Indians participating in the Games.

Sponsorship of Olympic telecasts was promoted through the services of a space-selling agency, Pahlaj Bajaj & Co. of Bombay, who offered Doordarshan a Rs 2 crore bank guarantee in advance. The company, which have sold everything from the Asiad mascot to programmes on World Cup cricket in the past, now stands to make a whopping profit at a 9 per cent commission. But its last-minute location of sponsors and oversell of space caused much confusion, with advertising messages often overlapping crucial moments of sporting events.

And for sport enthusiasts who monitored the telecasts and radio broadcasts minute-by-minute, Doordarshan and All India Radio's (AIR) errors became legion. Some examples:

► On August 2 after AIR had broadcast a running commentary live on the India vs Spain hockey match in both English and Hindi, a 10-minute interview with a New Zealand commentator followed assessing the Indian team's chances in a match already played.

► On August 3, after it had been announced that the India vs Australia match was to be telecast live at 10.45 p.m. credits for next evening's programme highlights promised an English feature film at 10.50 p.m.

► While the Australia vs Germany match was over at 6 a.m. Indian Standard Time on August 3, AIR carried no news of its result, crucial to India's chances, on either the 8.10 news bulletin or in the Olympic summary.

Beside despatching two Hindi commentators to cover hockey, Doordarshan and AIR made virtually no arrangements for spot coverage of Indians participating in other events. One newspaper group from Calcutta, on the other hand, sent as many as six journalists to cover the event.

HUM LOG

Double Bore

SPONSORED programmes for some time have come to be regarded as the bright new hope of Indian television (INDIA TODAY, June 30) but in Doordarshan's hands, it seems, the brightest of schemes can misfire. The latest sponsored programme to arrive in a flurry of controversy is the long-awaited Doordarshan-promoted soap opera *Hum Log*. After about a dozen episodes being aired, the twice-weekly serial betrays all signs of bombing, but that is not what is bothering the bureaucrats who came up with the idea. The programme is being produced in a recording studio owned by Dhirendra Brahmachari, the infamous yogi whose political connections evaporated when he was discovered to be running an illegal gun-manufacturing factory in Jammu last year. Worse, it is at least partially being financed by an advocate called H.L. Mehra, Brahmachari's lawyer who Fielded his bail application.

The idea for producing a soap-opera-with-a-social-message (*Hum Log*'s credits call it a "didactic serial") can be traced directly to the Secretary of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry, S.S. Gill. Although the concept had been floating around in Doordarshan for as long as two years, it was only when Gill made a special trip to Mexico in early January that he was smitten by a similar long-running soap Opera on Mexican TV that had inffuenced a drop in the country's birth rate.

Immediately on return, he set about fishing for potential script-writers to develop a similar soap opera. Given Doordarshan's burdened production facilities, it wasn't feasible so it was decided to find an independent producer who, in turn, could sell the programme to commercial sponsors. That producer turned out to be a Bombay-based advertising agency-owner, a plump, sharp-talking dynamo called Shobha Doctor. While Doordarshan handed over the production headaches and locating of sponsors to her, it exercised the right to supervise the script and co-present the programme with Doctor's company. To this end, it appointed its director of programmes, S.C. Garg, as the executive producer.

Meanwhile, with 39 episodes committed to Doordarshan on paper, Doctor arrived in New Delhi and floated her production company, Time & Space Video Communications in partnership with Chandra Oberoi, who is none other than the daughter of H.L. Mehra, Brahmachari's lawyer, confidante and studio manager. The programmes continue to be made in Brahmachari's Aparna Studio in Gurgaon outside Delhi. And grave embarrassment to Doordarshan is being caused by the fact that not only is the soap opera's executive producer one of its senior employees but Doordarshan shares the credit for *Hum Log* with Time & Space Video Communications.

Gill is understandably miffed about the soap opera's connection with Brahmachari. "We have no direct connection with Dhirendra Brahmachari or his studio," he says. "We are only supervising the script for an idea we mooted." Back in Bombay, Doctor is equally shrilly pleading innocence. "I haven't even met Brahmachari," she says. "Maybe I spoke to him on the phone once. And I was told before I hired the studio that he was no longer its managing director." Asked how, in that case, she had floated a company in partnership with Brahmachari's lawyer's daughter, Doctor said: "Because she was very helpful in providing the studio and helping me out. It's much easier for two women to collaborate." Still,the sponsors of the first 13 episodes of the programme, Food Specialities Ltd who have paid at the rate of Rs 1.25 lakh per programme, are probably thinking of extending their commitment. The reason, according to spokesman of the company, is that they get two of the best slots in the week at prime time at a cheaper rate—Rs 35,000 per programme against the normal rate of Rs 45,000 for plays—which is a good incentive.

However, independent television film producers have issued a strongly-worded statement criticising the arbirary manner in which the entire soap was handed out for production. Says P.D.P. Rao of TV Programme Producers Guild of India: "It's highly objectionable that Doordarshan should enter into a long-term contract without calling for an open tender as is usually the case". His views are shared by quite a few others.

The hue and cry over *Hum Log* wouldn't be so intense, were the programme anything different from the standard fare on Doordarshan. In terms of production skills and performances, the quality is so poor that even the story doesn't hold. So far, the characters introduced (a family of five daughters and two sons, each carrying an individual message: one married daughter is breeding too many children, another is childless, a third is battling problems of dowry etc) are either bumping into excess furniture on the set, or having their conversation drowned by offstage camera noises, or depending on the homily film star Ashok Kumar imparts at the end of each episode to pass on the message. In fact *Hum Log*'s life looks so bleak that it could be rechristened. Hum Drum.



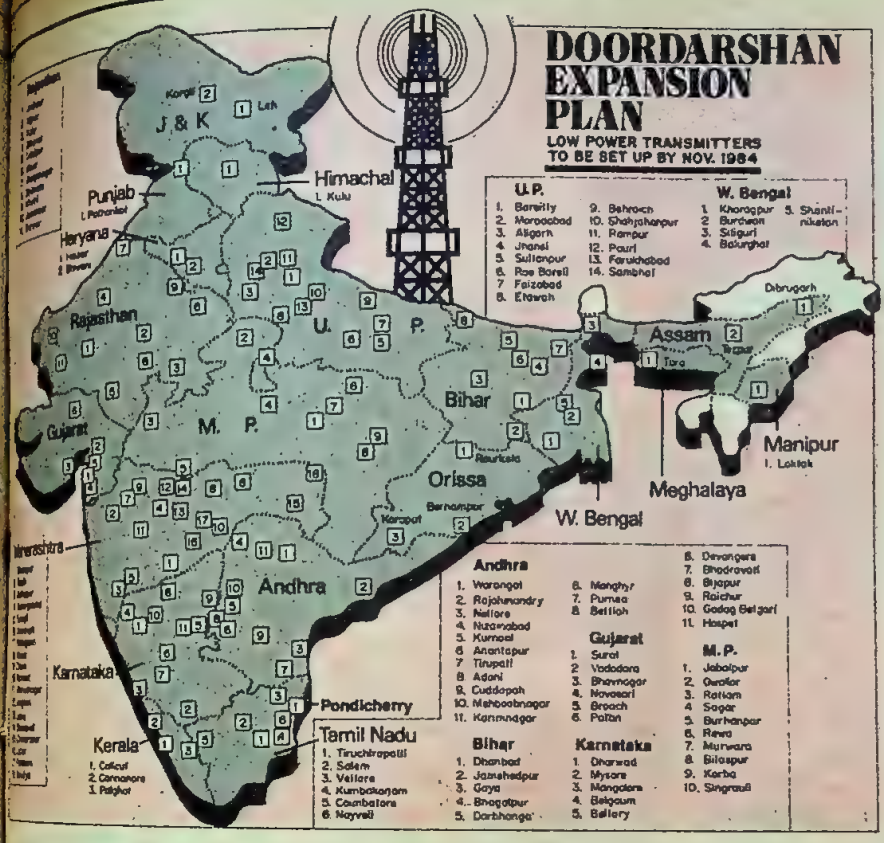
HARI OM GULATI





PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Brahmachari (left), Aparna Studios and Doctor: strange bedfellows in spurious soap opera



side viewers with an optional channel. The second channel relay is to be introduced in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras by year's end.

▶ A one-hour daily afternoon educational transmission beamed to 10,000 TV sets sponsored by the University Grants Commission and Doordarshan in Indian colleges and universities that will become operational by August 15.

▶ A separate Rs 39 crore expansion plan for the North-east to be implemented by 1986 which will instal eight high-power, three 10 kw and five 1 kw transmitters in north-eastern state capitals and towns together with limited programme production facilities.

While the concept of the second channel for Delhi and other metro towns, according to Doordarshan's new Director-eneral Harsh Khanna, "is to provide viewers with a choice if they don't want to plug into the regional hook-up" Doordarshan officials wonder if they have the infrastructure to produce more in house programmes. According to Mira Mozumdar, deputy director-general for programmes, Doordarshan's existing programme production facility infrastructure is already being strained to the maximum. "We will have to develop programme production bases outside Doordarshan, including more sponsored programmes and foreign programmes."

Considerably greater is the worry of producing regional language programmes for the 180 spanking new receivers being fitted out at the rate of one a day. As all these receiving stations are hooked to Delhi by the present satellite INSAT-1B viewers will be able to tune into programmes in Hindi and English only. And since language problems have for long been the sword at Doordarshan's throat (since its advent in 1975, for example, the Madras station has refused all Hindi programmes including Hindi news, allowing only Hindi feature films or film-based programmes like *Chitrahaar*). What the villagers in Tamil Nadu, or Orissa, or any of the non-Hindi-speaking states will make of the programmes is anybody's guess and the most senior of Doordarshan officials are hoping that the "novelty of TV will keep audiences plugged in".

Since the possibility of a town in Tamil Nadu being linked directly to Madras, or a village in Orissa to Bhubaneswar to receive programmes in Tamil and Oriya respectively will not arise till the advent of the second Indian satellite INSAT-2 sometime in the early 1990s, Doordarshan is in an all-encompassing quandary. "If there are 20 things to be done," explains I&B Secretary Gill when pressed for an answer to the problem, "you can't do them simultaneously."

This, others feel, is exactly where the paradox behind Doordarshan's disorderly and indiscriminate expansion lies. "Hardware expansion is simply not in proportion to software growth," says a senior official, admitting that the chief reason why the expansion programme is being pushed through with such zeal is "because the prime minister is dead set to see them completed before the election." Bhagat thinks that "it's rubbish" that people should think the expansion programme is geared for the coming election. As for the linguistic gaps that the programme will leave, he says: "Our idea is to link up the relay stations with state capitals, such as Hyderabad, Bangalore and Madras which telecast news in the regional language. But I cannot say how long this will take."

The new director-general, however, believes that despite the political pressure and constraints of infrastructure, a viable—and viewable—compromise can be struck. "What Doordarshan must quickly realise is that between the shoddy and excellent there lies an intermediate way of producing good, clean, sound programmes," says Khanna. He has isolated two departments, those dealing with news and current affairs and drama, as priority areas for attention. It is precisely in these fields that Pakistan television scores, claiming the attention of those Indian viewers who can plug in, especially in Punjab. Pakistan's news presentation, fuelled with a regular fund of newsworthy clips, as well as its plays and soaps are scene-stealers compared to Doordarshan's trite contributions.

At the same time Khanna concedes that he has inherited an organisation where "bad planning and bad editorial work" have become the norms. "Mismanagement of resources have further resulted in lowering staff morale."

"We've created a centralised apparatus, instead of an equitable one that can reflect local, regional and state aspirations. Also, Indian TV is too wordy. Its creative logistics have simply not been attended to. If Doordarshan has faults, then clearly something is wrong with our men, not our technology."

As Doordarshan approaches its silver jubilee—television in India will be 25 years old in the first week of September—a major overhaul is long overdue. Or its slide into becoming a rambling, sickly, unmanageable and partisan network, yet another monolith sponsored by and for the Government, is something of an inevitability.

—SUNIL SETHI

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ARMY BASE WORKSHOPS

Moscow's New Offensive

LAST fortnight, official confirmation was reluctantly forthcoming that India was proceeding with the purchase of Soviet MiG-29 fighters for the Indian Air Force, a fact that has been known for some time (INDIA TODAY, June 30,) but has been kept under wraps because of its negative implications for the Mirage-2000 deal with France. But the MiG-29 purchase also symbolises the return to an era of dependency, since it is just one item in an overflowing basket of weaponry that India has been buying from Moscow in the last two years, ranging from tanks to high reconnaissance spy planes to missiles and helicopters.

Spot purchases of equipment like the MiG-29 have, however, an even deeper significance considering the fact that it is not in active service with even the Soviet Air Force as yet. On the one hand, this clearly indicates a certain desperation on the part of Moscow to outbid and outmanoeuvre its western rivals for India's burgeoning arms requirements. Dependence on arms supplies, as neighbour General Zia-ul-Haq has so amply demonstrated, translates at some inevitable stage into a greater political obligation that cannot but cause a certain amount of concern, as expressed in Parliament last fortnight by opposition MP Suresh Kalmadi and others, even if the ruling party seems unmoved by the fact.

What is causing even greater concern is the fact that dependence on the Soviets is now creeping into new areas that undermine India's laborious attempts to become self-reliant in defence production. According to highly reliable sources, the decision to set up an Infantry Combat Vehicle (ICV) manufacturing plant at Medak, Mrs Gandhi's constituency, with Soviet expertise is only part of a much larger under-the-wraps agreement that more or less invites the Soviets to take over a number of existing and planned Army Base Workshops (ABW) for the avowed purpose of setting up repair and spare part manufacturing facilities for Soviet weaponry in the Indian inventory. The deal includes:

► A new ABW to be set up in New Delhi for the repair and overhauling of T-72 tanks. Indian Army estimates indicate that the eventual number of T-72s in the Indian Army will number something in the region of 4,000 which means a commitment that will extend well beyond the '80s into the '90s;

► Another ABW which represents a modernisation project and repair facility for the Indian Army's ageing T-55 tanks. Since the Soviets have stopped production of their T-55s, Poland has been asked to set up the facility which would cost something in the region of Rs 60 crore of which a large amount has already been paid for technical documents.

► A ABW for anti-aircraft weapon systems (Kudrat and Schilka, to give them their Indian nomenclature) mounted on PT-76 tanks.

Apart from the increase in dependance on the Soviets, it is becoming clear that the old argument that Soviet systems are far cheaper than western ones is not entirely true as far as their more advanced weaponry is concerned. The T-72, for instance, was being bought by India for Rs 70 lakh each when the original agreement was signed in 1980. Today, the tank comes with a price-tag of Rs 1.1 crore. Similarly, the Schilka and Kudrat systems will work out to Rs 14 crore and Rs 15 crore per system, a figure comparable to prices available in the western arms bazaars.

But there are other more questionable aspects to the latest agreement with the Soviets; mainly concerning the fact that it puts a serious cramp on the country's own defence production plans. It had originally been decided that the ICV project would be purely indigenous and would be built around the Vijayanta tank which the Indian Army has in large numbers. With the decision to set up the ICV project in Medak, that programme has now been effectively scuttled.

Similarly, the decision to acquire 4,000 T-72s is clear indication that India's much-vaunted Main Battle Tank project is not likely to materialise anywhere near its scheduled date of debut. This is also symbolised by the ABW being set up to modernise the T-55s, now over 20 years old. The T-55 agreement, however, is the clearest signal that the new Soviet offensive to woo India back into its arms fold has been successfully orchestrated. The T-55s have been in service with the Indian Armoured Corps for over a decade without any attempt being made to improve its performance, correct its chronic overheating problem, or introduce any new technology. The sudden change of heart indicates that the Soviet lobby has succeeded completely in selling the ABW agreement as an all-or-nothing package deal to the Indian Government.

The final-price tag for the deal, however, might be even larger than has been foreseen in the context of its wider political implications as well as the implications it holds for India's existing indigenous defence production efforts.

—DILIP BOBB

The Indian army's Soviet built ICV and the Schilka air defence system



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PARTHASARATHI

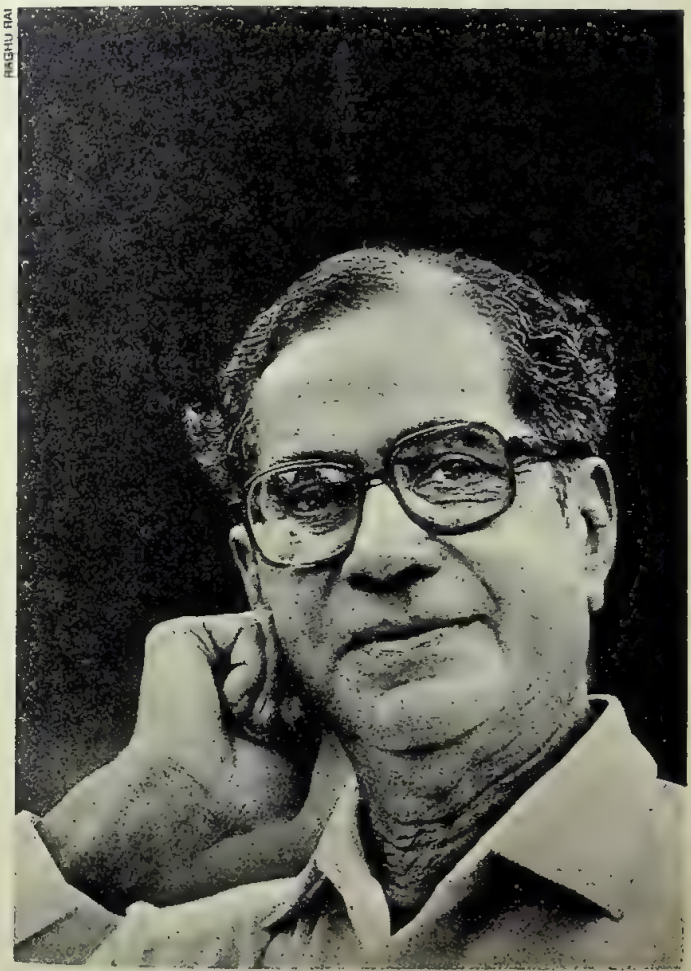
The Master Mediator

IN INDIRA Gandhi's long and eventful reign, no one, politician or civil servant, has stayed longer at the centre of power or very close to it than Gopalaswamy Parthasarathi. One morning in the first week of August, he carried his erect, slim, elegant frame of 71 years back to the red carpetted foreoffice in the South Block of the Central Secretariat after a gap of eight years. The turf was familiar and you could say this was a home-coming of sorts.

In the fifties, Parthasarathi left *the Hindu* in Madras to join the foreign service. After a brilliant career in diplomacy, including stints as a secretary, as India's representative at the UN and as ambassador to Pakistan, Parthasarathi was rewarded with his first political appointment as chairman of the external affairs ministry's newly-active policy planning division with the personal rank of a minister of state.

He is virtually in charge of the entire ministry, with the rank of a cabinet minister; he is to oversee the work of two junior ministers of state as well as the foreign service bureaucracy and to give advice, consent and guidance from the prime minister who remains, more than nominally, minister for foreign affairs. The only other man who has been placed in the same general position with the same rank was the late D.P. Dhar charged with the coordination and conduct of the political-military operations in Bangladesh; Parthasarathi's operational field is much wider, covering the entire range of India's relations with the rest of the world. However, he is confining himself more or less to "crisis diplomacy" and to India's relations with the superpowers.

The appointment has stirred the capital's diplomatic grapevine with many questions for which there are no answers at this moment. They revolve around Mrs Gandhi's reasons for appointing Parthasarathi rather than a professional. Some see it a temporary arrangement till the next election, others as a first step in a possible political career for Parthasarathi. The man himself prefers to keep a low profile, and declines to make any comment. But his appointment reflects Mrs Gandhi's obvious confidence in him. Of all her chief foreign policy advisors, Parthasarathi is the only one who has survived the tumultuous 1970s and is studiously quiet about the Emergency whose compulsions he seemed then to understand. In 1977, when the Janata Party came to power, Parthasarathi resigned his post as chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, but he returned to it when Mrs Gandhi stormed back to power in January 1980.


RAGHU RAI

His forte has been quiet diplomacy. He has chosen to remain aloof from public controversies; he is probably the one important figure in New Delhi who avoids seminars, public forums, the press and television. People who know him well are not sure that he is made of political timber. One of his weaknesses is a high sensitiveness to public criticism and attack. In his six years as the first vice-chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, not only was the now riotous campus attractively quiet, there was no major controversy involving the university or the vice-chancellor that hit the headlines.

He excels as a mediator and is one of the ablest negotiators the Indian foreign service has produced. Cool-headed, affable, soft-spoken and gifted with a sharp analytical mind, he proved himself to be of considerable value to Mrs Gandhi as a trouble-shooter in such diverse crisis situations as Kashmir and Colombo. His world view is Indo-centric; he judges world forces and issues mainly with a single measurement: what is or can be in India's interests, how these interests can be defended, strengthened and advanced? Not a markedly theoretical or ideological man, he takes a pragmatic view of issues and developments, though he inclines slightly towards the left of the centre in his social, economic and political ideas and views. Parthasarathi is an interesting combination of Tamil conservatism and Nehruvian liberalism. Though aloof and distant in temperament, and known for his enduring likes and dislikes of people, part of his effectiveness as a backstage trouble-shooter and a diplomat is his ability to work with others, to reconcile conflicting positions, and to build bridges between apparently antagonistic parties.

The coming months before the election will test his diplomatic fibre as never before. Will he be able to contain the growing Indo-US rift? If the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka continues it may cost Mrs Gandhi a lot of votes in Tamil Nadu. And things don't look much better with Pakistan or Bangladesh. Will Parthasarathi be able to keep India's relations with its neighbours in good shape? "It won't be fair to expect a GP imprint in India's relations with the neighbours in the short period before the poll," remarked a diplomat who knows him well. "The question is whether he will be in charge after the poll." An intriguing question indeed, more so because it has no answer.

—BHABANI SEN GUPTA

COPY CATS

IT'S BOOM time for the photocopying industry, with a host of foreign companies making a splash in the Indian market, and sales growing rapidly. Predictably, the Japanese companies now dominate the scene: Canon has tied up with the Chowgules, and Ricoh with Murphy India, while Sharp is negotiating with the Ram Kishen Kulwant Rai group. Yet another Japanese brand to enter the Indian market is Minolta. However, Xerox plans to capture the upper end of the market with heavy duty machines, the production of which will start early next year in collaboration with the Modis. Market growth has been so fast that the total population of machines in the country is expected to double this year, while Xerox alone intends to hit a Rs 50 crore turnover in its first year of operations, and then to ask for a sharp increase in licensed capacity, from the present 9,500 machines per year, while simultaneously diversifying its product range to introduce low-volume copiers as well.

BACK ON THE TRACK

SHIPPING delays have started affecting Maruti Udyog's production schedules. The Shipping Corporation has failed to keep to its schedules, so that the Maruti factory was virtually shut down for over 10 days in July, and is likely to be shut down again for over a week in August. The company has also run into problems with the quality of goods supplied by vendors. Rejections have in some cases been as high as 50 to 80 per cent in items like glass windscreens and wheel rims. These have resulted in a slippage of production schedules during July, but company spokesmen hope to meet the production target of 3,800 cars for the July-September quarter. Also, vendor quality has in most cases improved after the initial problems.

A RED REUNION

THE SOVIETS are back as aggressive buyers of Indian industrial products. After an 18-month-lull, when they cut back sharply on purchases and restricted buying to essential products, Indo-Soviet trade is booming again. Exports of items monitored by the Basic Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics Export Promotion Council showed a sharp increase during the quarter ended June, totalling Rs 126 crore compared to Rs 72 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous year. The exports of drugs alone shot up from Rs 29 crore to Rs 51 crore. Most of these were to the Soviet Union. However, there is no cheer for the companies who set up detergent and cosmetics producing facilities at the Kandla free trade zone in anticipation of continuing Soviet orders. Against peak quarterly purchases of Rs 34 crore in April-June 1982, exports in April-June 1984 totalled a bare Rs 5 crore.

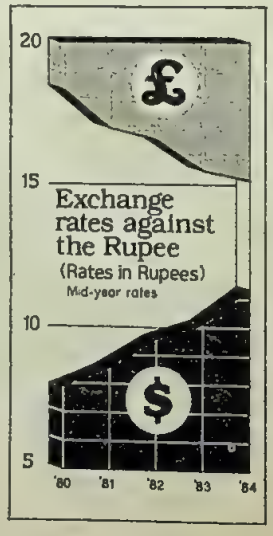
MATERIAL GAINS

THE EMPIRE Industries group, with a total turnover of Rs 38 crore, plans to get out of the textile business by selling one of its constituent units, Empire Dyeing. The company proprietor, Satish Malhotra, plans subsequently to sell Empire Dyeing's real estate assets in Parel, Bombay, and to use the expected take of Rs 3 crore to buy into some high-technology companies. The share purchases will tie in with planned investments by non-residents, including Malhotra's brothers abroad.

DRUG TRAFFIC

A NUMBER of people are in the running for acquiring the Bangalore-based Anglo-French Drug Company. Among them are Raghu Mody of the Rasoi group, the Kanorias and Vijay Mallya of United Breweries. R.P. Goenka of the Duncan group had considered a bid, but decided against acquiring a stake in the company because of its marginal profitability and lack of real growth prospects. The company is up for sale because its parent company, Roche Products, wants to restructure its Indian operations.

RUPEE RAMBLINGS



THE RUPEE has been losing steadily against the dollar, reflecting the US currency's overall strength on global money markets. Over the last four years, since mid-1980, the rupee has slippedfrom Rs 7.9 per dollar to Rs 11.4—a drop of roughly 45 per cent. Simultaneously the rupee has gained by about 17 per cent against the British pound, and by smaller margins against other major currencies. With global oil prices denominated in dollars, the changes in the external value of India's currency can hardly contribute to correcting the serious trade imbalance.

TEA PARTY

THE OVERSEAS shareholdings of Warren Tea and Warren Industrial are likely to be transferred to Indian hands in a few months' time. Warren Tea has a 74 per cent shareholding, and Warren Industrial 40 per cent. Both these chunks of shares had changed hands last year, with the London-based Ruias buying the British holding company that owns these shares. Subsequently, a Ruia relative, V.K. Goenka, had taken charge of Warren Tea. The share transfer that is now planned may allow Goenka a formal shareholding stake.

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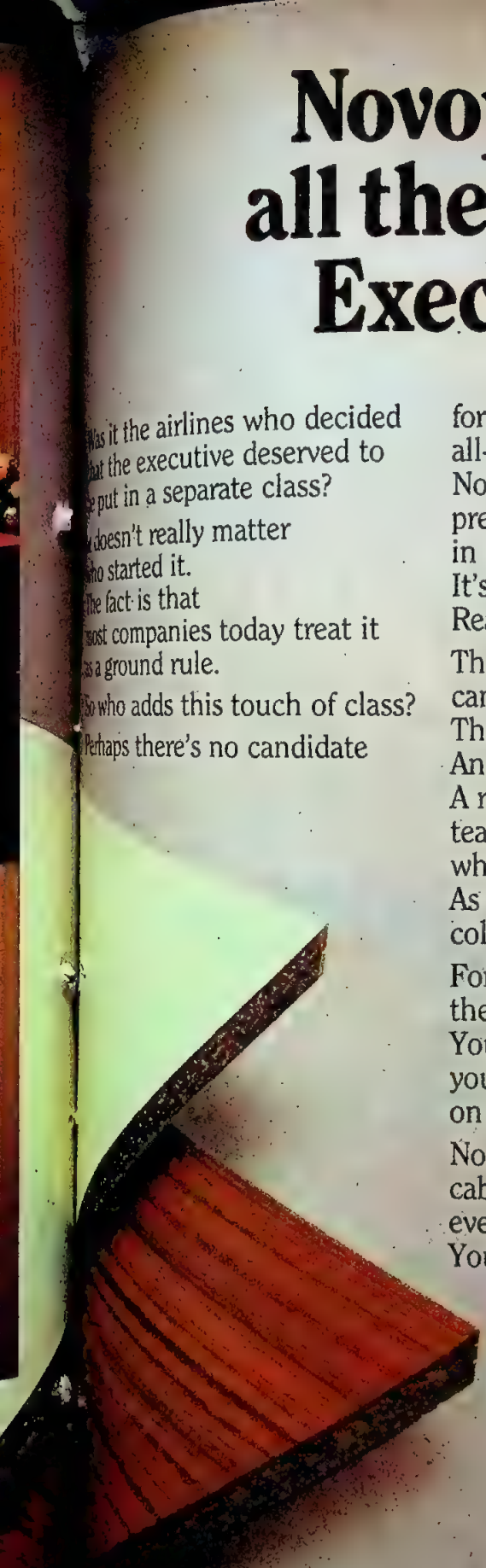
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DEVELOPMENT

The Economic Olympiad



EVERYONE, or nearly everyone, thinks of India as a poor down-at-heel country with half the population wondering where its next meal is coming from. It comes therefore as a surprise to know that if a world economic olympics were to be held, India would win at least two gold medals, two silvers and two bronzes. The phrase 'at least' is because all the statistics about all the countries are not available and the medal tally is based on figures listed in the latest edition of the *Statistical Outline of India* which is published by the Tatas once every two years.

India produces more groundnuts (30 per cent of the world's total output) and rice (also about 30 per cent) than any other country and would win a gold medal in these two items hands down. It is the second largest producer of rice (paddy) and butter, which account for the two silvers. As far as the bronzes are concerned, there is tobacco and cotton yarn, of which India produces about 10 per cent of the world total.

All these, you will see, are farm-based products, which is not surprising, considering that India is the third largest agricultural country in the world, after the US and the Soviet Union. In industrial items, India is nowhere near the top, being No. 11 in cement, No. 7 in iron ore and No. 5 in manganese ore, though we are supposed to be among the top 15 industrial countries of the world.

In per capita terms, the picture is even more depressing. Nearly every country in the world with the exception of Burma, Bangladesh and China, consumes more sugar per head than we do, and also more energy (in terms of coal equivalent). In terms of crude steel, we do a little better, but not much, and even Egypt consumes nearly three times as much steel per head as we do. Whether it is passenger cars, radio sets or telephones, only Burma and Bangladesh seem to be doing worse than us, which is not much of a consolation for a country of our size and potential.

Most of us tend to blame the general sluggishness in development on the abnormal increases in population which devours whatever is produced and leaves next to nothing for development. But this may not be entirely true. Assume for the sake of the argument that there was no increase at all in population since 1950, when it was about half the current population. The living standard indicators and the indices of consumption would automatically double and appear much more respectable than they are today, but even then, they would not bring us any closer to the living standards enjoyed by others.

Sugar consumption per head would double from 8 kg per year to about 16 kg, still quite low by international standards.

Is it too much to ask that a country of India's size and potential should aim, as a matter of natural right at 10 gold medals, if not more, twice as many silvers and thrice as many bronzes in the international economic olympics?

The consumption of energy would go up to 400 kg of coal equivalent, about one-thirtieth of that of the US and one-twentieth of most other advanced nations. Crude steel consumption would be around 40 kg per year, less than 6 per cent of that in Japan and 8 per cent of that in the USSR. Our consumption of newsprint would go up to just about 1 kg per year, still less than 2 per cent of that in the US, and about 4 per cent of that in Japan. There would be one telephone among 125 persons, as against slightly over one in the US, two in Great Britain and Japan, and 11 in the USSR. And there would be one passenger car among 350 persons against two in the US—a ratio of 175 to 1—5 in Japan and 4 in Great Britain.

A slow-down in population would certainly help but what is holding India back is that the country is just not producing enough in relation to its size. As a people, we seem to be content with marginal rates of growth, 1 per cent here, 2 per cent there, and we crow with delight at the slightest sign of a shift in the decimal point. This attachment to decimals is a peculiar Indian phenomenon. There is something in the Indian soul—and possi-bly in the Indian soil—which seems to be deeply dedicated to stability, another word for stagnation. Nearly everything is stable, or stagnant, depending upon how you view it. Our growth rate has been stagnant at 3.5 per cent a year, a rate that is lower than the rate of 90 other countries. All over the world and all over Asia, the percentage of workers in agriculture has been steadily coming down but not in India: it was 72 per cent in the census of 1911, that is 70 years ago, when the British were very much here, and it was 72 per cent in the 1981 census, 35 years after they had left our country.

The number of the poor has remained at a steady level of 50 per cent all these years, though the planners keep on fiddling with the figures. The number of the unemployed has also remained stable at 8 per cent, year in and year out, no matter how you choose to define unemployment. "We are a very very stable society," says former Planning Commission member Raj Krishna, "anything which is unstable somewhere, bring it here, we will make it stable."

There is a great deal of talk about destabilising the polity, but it is surprising that nobody has thought of destabilising the economy. It could do with some shaking up. If we were not so contented with small things, India would now be producing more than 250 million tonnes of foodgrains, 50 million tonnes of steel, as many tonnes of cement, 100,000 mw of electricity capacity, 15 million tonnes of nitrogen, and a million passenger cars a year. This would have helped us to do without aid, reduce the number of people below the poverty line to no more than 15 per cent, which is the norm in most countries, and it would have helped us step up our exports three-fold and provide every family with a pucca house.

Is it too much to ask that a country of India's size and potential should aim, as a matter of natural right, at 10 gold medals, if not more, twice as many silvers and thrice as many bronzes in the international economic olympics? India should be *exporting* at least 20 million tonnes of foodgrains a year after feeding every Indian at a much higher level of nutrition than at present. And it should be in a position to pepper the whole country with steel plants, for it has iron ore, coal and technical manpower to do so. There is surely something we can excel at, something we can do better than the rest of the world, something that can bring us more than a couple of piffling gold medals in nuts and tea. Nuts, indeed.

Is it fair to assess a Government's performance after only 18 months?

Why not? After all, 'only 18 months' is as many as 548 days!

says the Karnataka Government.

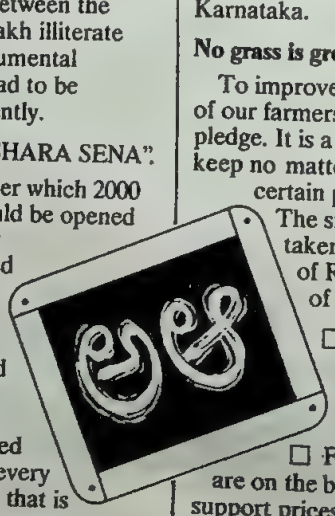
548 days are a lot of days. Provided your sights are clear, your routes are charted and you set out on Day 1. That's one of the disciplines we decided never to compromise on. A lot needed to be done and procrastination would get us nowhere. Events have proved that our endeavours have been rewarded with results. Filling us with more than a sense of achievement. Because they stand for obligations honoured, pledges kept.

Opening doors. For young and old.

The 1981 census figures were cold and analytical. Karnataka State had 55 lakh illiterate children between the ages 6 and 14, and 120 lakh illiterate adults above 15. A monumental problem, but one that had to be tackled. Quickly. Efficiently.

The result. The "AKSHARA SENA".

A unique scheme under which 2000 pre-primary schools would be opened every year. 3769 literacy centres have been started to impart non-formal education. Places where enrolled students as well as dropouts could continue their learning during their free hours. This year we have decided to open such centres in every village panchayat. A step that is expected to bring literacy to three lakh adults.



In our comprehensive education bill, passed recently, we have proposed certain reforms for the overall improvement in the educational climate of Karnataka. Briefly, these are:

- ☐ Abolition of capitation fee for admission to educational institutions
- ☐ Regulation of tuition, deposit and other kinds of fees
- ☐ Entrance examinations to professional colleges

While we are alive to the problems in the entire State, our main thrust, however, continues to be in rural Karnataka.

No grass is greener than your own.

To improve the life and conditions of our farmers is our most important pledge. It is a promise we will keep no matter how insoluble certain problems might seem. The steps we have already taken incurring an expenditure of Rs.70 crore are indicative of our intentions.

- ☐ The long overdue Takavi, fodder and flood relief loans have been written off
- ☐ Food grain purchases are on the basis of remunerative support prices
- ☐ Farmers using the irrigation facility provided by the Government are exempted from paying water rate for five years
- ☐ Interest and penal interest of over Rs.27 crore on co-operative and agricultural loans have been paid by the Government benefitting 7.62 lakh farmers
- ☐ The quantity of seeds supplied to farmers was four times over the previous year's
- ☐ 1.74 lakh hectares have been covered under the Dry Land Farming Scheme
- ☐ Restrictions on the movement of foodgrains within the State have been removed

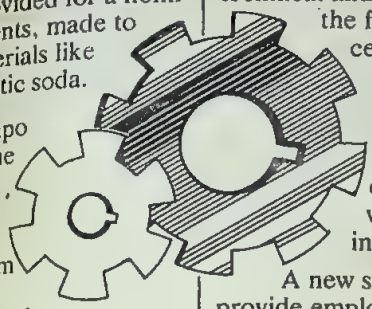
We have given concessions in many other areas. Wherever possible, we have blended short-term solutions with long-term plans.

For the adventurous. Opportunities.

To encourage our people to turn their efforts towards industrialisation, many plans have been put forward and incentives provided. Our Industrial Policy states that 1000 additional units will be put up every month in the small scale sector. We have already achieved a figure of 630 units a month.

We have sought to provide encouragement and assistance to entrepreneurs in every conceivable area. Plots and sheds have been

...led on rental/hire purchase;
...ical guidance, provided for a nomi-
...e; and arrangements, made to
...h scarce raw materials like
...pig iron and caustic soda.

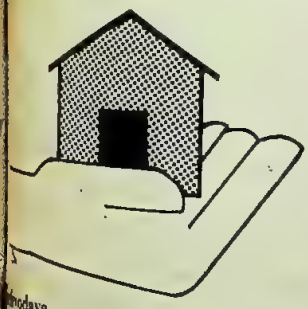


To speed up the tempo
...dustrialisation is the
...e "SINGLE
...DOW AGENCY".
...agency assists
...preneurs right from
...nception to the
...ating of the end product.

...e poor. A new life. A new hope.

...Integrated Rural Development
...mme aims to assist selected
...s among the poor. Assistance is
...d to these families in the form
...come-generating assets and access
...dit.

...grammed to cover 600 families in
...block, the target was 105000
...ficiaries. We actually exceeded
...ure by 92.6% and covered
...0 beneficiaries.



...yodaya.

...ed at the amelioration of the
...mic conditions of the poorest of
...or in the rural areas, the
...yodaya programme provides these
...ies not only with a home, but land
...ification and capital for self-
...yment. Last year, 7638 benefitted
...this programme.

...ouraging self-sufficiency.

...help unemployed
...ates start tiny and small scale
...tries, we have introduced a new
...me by which a maximum of Rs.1
...will be offered to applicants who
...to start industries in rural areas.

Help has also been provided to technical and professional persons in the form of increasing the ceiling on 100% financing from Rs.5 lakh to Rs.7.5 lakh. Many other incentives, such as subsidies, are being offered to persons who are willing to start the first industry in the State.

A new scheme has been started to provide employment to all illiterate and unskilled able-bodied adults between the ages of 18 and 60 years.

In the 45 taluks where the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has been operating from January 26, 1984, we have been able to provide employment to 111717 persons and paid out wages amounting to Rs.85.94 lakh.

For Lokayukta—read clean administration.

We realise that we owe it to the people of the State to give them public servants whose integrity cannot be questioned. At the same time, it is our intention to give a fair hearing to the people of this State if aspersions are cast on a public official. With this in mind, we have formed a special cell called 'Lokayukta'.
This cell is to be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or an ex-Chief Justice of a High Court, who will thoroughly investigate any charges against any public official, irrespective of his or her standing. No public servant will be beyond the jurisdiction of the Lokayukta and even co-operative societies and other Government bodies will be under its purview. While we will give our undivided attention to every charge, we will be severe with false, flippant and uncorroborated accusations.

Quench your thirst.

Due to adverse seasonal conditions, drinking water scarcity in villages reached alarming proportions in 1982-83. Working round the clock, we were able to ease the distress considerably by digging 20000 borewells in 16000 villages. 560 open



wells were sunk where borewells were not feasible.

Beginnings have been made in many other areas to improve the condition of life in Karnataka.

- ☐ Decentralisation of the Administration Bill formulated for the establishment of Mandal Panchayats and Zilla Parishads.
- ☐ 'Samagra Sarige Yojane.' Our Rural Transport Scheme aiming to provide road transport to every village in the State
- ☐ Travel concessions given to school children, college students, journalists and aged people
- ☐ The First Minorities Commission and The Second Backward Classes Commission, for the welfare of the minorities and backward classes, have already started functioning
- ☐ Merit students from scheduled castes and tribes have been provided direct employment at the officer level
- ☐ Revised minimum wages fixed for 14 categories of employment

We know that the effort and industry put in are yielding results of the right kind. That is what we sought and will continue to seek.

And so the work continues...

karnataka information

Keeping our pledges. One by one.

DIP-1639-A

PACKAGED FOOD

The Instant Boom

FOUR years ago, when K. Ramamurthy's wife Shymala left home to visit her parents, the overworked Madras-based executive's household used to virtually fall apart: cooking was a hassle, even rustling up breakfast was a time-consuming chore. Not any more. Thanks to the instant food mixes available in the market, making breakfast now is "a matter of a quarter of an hour". In Bangalore, State Bank of Mysore employee J. Shivkumar has instant foods on his breakfast table at least twice a week; in Bombay, housewife Sujata Raikar is cheered by the convenience of dosa, idli, and gulab jamun mixes, while in Calcutta Pakhi Bhatia, who works for Oberoi Grand Hotel, looks forward to more ready-to-serve foods like Maggi "two minute noodles".

Ramamurthy, Shivkumar, Raikar and Bhatia are among the increasing numbers of big-city men and women who are picking instant foods off grocery store shelves: canned soups, baked beans and *sarson ka saag*, peas, ice cream powders, soyabean products like Nutri Nuggets and Nutrela, Maggi noodles, a wide spectrum of idli, dosa and vada mixes, frozen pizzas, Bawarchi frozen vegetable curries and Lipton's Supermum pasta products among others.

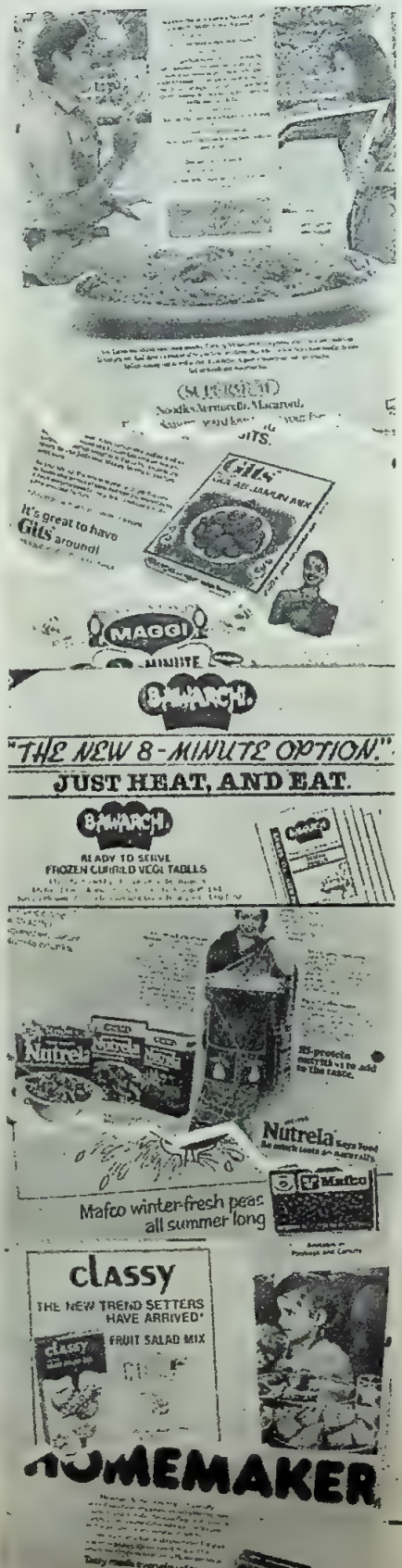
This proliferation of products has combined with the entry of new manufacturers, sharply rising sales curves and increasing consumer acceptance to make for a boom in convenience foods that is quite unprecedented. Madras housewife Sarasa Rao says her monthly outlay on instant foods has climbed from 5 to 20 per cent of her provisions budget. P.M. Natarajan, who owns Nilgiris, the largest instant foods retail shop in the same city, says that over the last year alone, monthly sales of instant foods have shot up by more than 100 per cent, from about Rs 25,000 to over Rs 50,000. Companies in the business have inevitably prospered. The Delhi-based Northland Industries, which makes baked beans and tomato purees, reports that sales have more than doubled in three years, while the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation's (NAFED) turnover for its instant food products has risen by between 25 and 35 per cent last year.

The trickle of convenience food manufacturers is therefore turning into a flood. Last May, the Midland Fruit & Vegetable Products (India) Private Limited launched in Delhi four frozen paneer-based curries under the Bawarchi brand name and intends to diversify into frozen soups and juices, biryanis, rice and vegetables, and rice and dal. Ravi Ghai's G.L. Hotels and Kwality Frozen Foods plans to introduce in Bombay in a few weeks sauce and flavour accentuators and frozen desserts, to be followed by frozen mutton and chicken curries in October. Food Specialities Ltd, the Maggi noodles company, is toying with introducing noodles with more complex 'tastemakers' and soup mixes while Vijay Mallaya's McDowell & Co is examining "a lot of products". Company Marketing Manager J.K. Bose says some of these will be launched next year in the four metropolitan cities and Bangalore. He is cagey about giving product specifics, but a competitor suggests that marketing frozen pizzas would be a logical extension of McDowell's fast food outlet in Delhi, Pizza King. Bose expects an initial turnover of Rs 2-3 crore for the company's ready-to-serve foods.

Meanwhile the small Fun Foods has been hawking frozen pizzas for a year in Delhi and has just made a foray into Bombay. NAFED will in November launch tinned pasta products with cheese and tomato sauce, while Lipton has kicked off the sale of its packaged pasta products in Bombay, Madras, and Bangalore. Finally Krishna Flour Mills in Bangalore will soon manufacture soups, and idli and dosa mixes.

So today's Rs 25 crore plus market is all set to explode. Anand Baruah, a partner of Unit 61, the Bombay-based marketing advertising agency which represents Gits Food Products, estimates that the traditional fare like papads, jams and ketchups, in Bombay alone is Rs 1.5 crore to Rs 2 crore. Baruah says that judging by the experience of Gits, this market has been growing by at least 25 per cent a year in the last few years. If that rate of growth continues, the market will double every three years, and cross the Rs 100 crore threshold in six years.

There are, of course, those who do not think the world is about to open up for convenience foods. Among these, surprisingly, is Gits proprietor M.A. Tejani, who argues that the market remains restricted to a narrow segment of urban society, to Bombay and more recently Delhi. "In Calcutta," says Tejani, "nobody would dream of forking



Packets of convenience: brisk sales



The proliferation of instant foods, the entry of new manufacturers, sharply rising sales curves and increasing consumer acceptance have made for a boom in convenience foods.

...a fiver on a packaged food product." ...argues that the market is confined to ...one section of the middle class, ...because the upper class consumer prefers ...to spend more on freshly cooked foods, ...while the poor are priced out of the market ...anyway. Says Tejani: "You can understand how small the market is from the ...fact that after 21 years we are still concentrating on the export market, and the ...bulk of our sales still go to Indians abroad."

BUT TEJANI appears as a solitary Cassandra in a crowd which sees a boom time ahead for the industry. Ram Sehgal, New Delhi branch manager of Hindustan Thompson Associates, while conceding that the market is still immature and large enough, argues that the instant foods trend has begun, and that it will accelerate in the future—and the future is not very far. R.A. Narayanan, managing director of the Karnataka-based Orkay, a Gits rival, believes that the tide turned in favour of convenience foods about three years ago.

The trend was helped along by a combination of factors: rising per capita incomes and living standards, the quickening pace of life in cities, excise and other Government concessions in the last two Union budgets and the rising number of working women in the four metropolitan cities. Professor Vinayshil Gautam of New Delhi's Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), who surveyed the buying decisions of women in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, affirms: "The buying decisions of working women are based on time-saving considerations." And even the non-working women, Sehgal argues, want to spend less time in the kitchen and more on leisure activities.

Some of the new consumer interest has clearly been sparked off by heavy advertising. Food Specialities sold Rs 3.05 crore worth of Maggi noodles in 1983, the year they were introduced, and spent a little less than Rs 1 crore on promoting and marketing the product. The bill is now down to between Rs 60 lakh and Rs 70 lakh, but in an environment where the media network embraces more magazines and newspapers plus television, the selling of products, lifestyle, convenience and the pleasure concept in eating has reached a new pitch.

Given this conjunction of upbeat factors, instant food manufacturers should strike gold. But there are hurdles in the way, and the list of convenience foods that failed on the market in the past should provide a warning about the dangers implicit in an industry that has witnessed a high mortality rate. Hindustan Lever burnt its fingers on Hima peas and could not hit a breakeven turnover level, and Weikfield's range of instant mixes failed to find sufficient acceptance, as did Western India Bakeries' foods.

Even some of the new products on grocery store shelves could run into problems. Laziz frozen curries were a precursor to today's Bawarchi and came a cropper in Bombay, and Bawarchi's own sales have tumbled in some affluent New Delhi localities. Perhaps because of this the company has slashed prices from Rs 12 per 200 grammes pouch to Rs 9.90. Even this may not be enough to fend off competition from Ravi Ghai's lower priced products, due to be launched in January for between Rs 6 and Rs 8 per packet. But Bawarchi manufacturer, Midland's P.N. Bhargava, claims that maximum sales have been notched up in working class areas and in old Delhi, and that his company has passed on the benefits of reduced costs to the consumer.

Bhargava adds that some of the failures of the past were the result of high prices, poor quality and inadequate turnovers. And D.E. Ardeshir, marketing manager of Food Specialities says: "Some of the major factors contributing to such failures have been inadequate research into consumer needs and attitudes, inconsistent quality standards and inadequate marketing investment."

The big question is whether these factors have changed. Y.K. Kapoor of Northland Industries has little doubt that they have: "More girls are working, so

convenience has become an important factor. The Government should help the process by reducing taxes further." Dismissing the failure of Hima peas in the past he said: "But the Gits products have been successful. People today have more money, and prejudices against packaged foods are going."

Nevertheless, as Kapoor himself is quick to emphasise, problems remain, high taxes being an important one. The boom in convenience foods has also been spurred by the entry of a host of small manufacturers who often operate in localised or regional markets. Many of them have virtually no holding capacity to last out a bad patch, packaging costs are inordinately high, the low sales volumes prompt retailers to demand large sales commissions, while capacity utilisation is often dismal. There is also, as Ghai puts it, the Indians "unbelievable obsession with the freshness of food".

The industry's current total annual output of 62,000 tonnes accounts for merely 0.2 per cent of the total quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables that go waste, capacity utilisation is less than 40 per cent, and prices are exorbitant because of cascading taxes and high packing costs. NAFED's Area Sales Manager, R.K. Chawla, estimates that over half the retail price of a canned product goes to the Government as taxes, and a Clarion Advertising Services study on the canned food industry notes: "The plate imported for packaging is more than twice the cost of the packed contents."

Fortunately for the consumer, the entry of the industry's big boys holds out the promise of lower prices. They don't have to bear the burden of setting up new distribution channels, and can peg prices lower because of the economies of scale involved in large volume production. Also, a Planning Commission committee has before it proposals to scrap excise on processed foods and the duty on imported tin plate for cans, and to permit the duty-free import of machinery. NAFED factory manager H.C. Lal says that if the proposals are accepted, canned items can be reduced by 40 per cent.

On balance, the conjunction of factors that favour the rapid growth of the industry seem now to outweigh the factors that caused so many failures in the past. The demand in the market-place is unmistakable, and numerous manufacturers have clearly spotted good pickings, and hope for more. Predicts ITT's Gautam: "This marks the coming of the disposable container society.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Restrictive Practice

FOR YEARS, India has struggled with the problems caused by refusal of foreign suppliers to provide equipment and technology for the country's atomic energy programme. Now that experience could well be repeated in a much wider technological field, including electronics, computers, robotics engines, silicon and electronic telephone exchanges, among others.

A series of steps in recent years and months has resulted in tighter control by the US Government over the technology and equipment that companies in those countries can supply to a variety of countries, including India. At best, this means delaying supplies by months. At worst, it means an outright denial of hardware and know-how vital to the country's industrial and technological development.

The restrictions are designed mainly to prevent technology and equipment of military applications from finding their way into the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries. In the process some other destinations have been added to the banned list—including India and others like Austria and Norway—because these are geographically or politically close to the Soviet Union.

Over the last year, the US Government has refused permission to US computer manufacturer Digital Electronic Corporation (DEC) to sell the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) for Rs 40 lakh VAX 11/780 computers for its research programme. In addition, two computers ordered from another computer company for defence applications have also been refused the required export licences and cleavances.

Some other projects that need American equipment are still awaiting clearance. One is the Baroda-based National Silicon Facility (NSF), which has signed up with a US firm, Hemlock, for technical collaboration to manufacture hyper-pure silicon used by the electronics and solar energy industries. Newspaper reports that the US has refused to clear the deal are denied by government officials in Delhi, who say that Hemlock's application is being considered "sympathetically" in Washington. But the clearance is still awaited.

In a second case, the National Information Centre (NIC) in Delhi, set up initially with assistance under the UN Development Programme, wanted recently to expand its powerful Cyber 170/730 system, manufactured by the Control Data Corporation (CDC). But Washington's clearance came through only on the condition that the NIC computer would not be used to service India's atomic energy units.

So far, the restrictions have been mostly on large computers that can be used for defence applications or in India's atomic energy programme, which is viewed suspiciously in Washington because of New Delhi's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But decisions in western capitals in recent months have meant that the dragnet is going to spread wider in the future, and will perhaps cover even such harmless products as some kinds of personal computers—on the grounds that these have been used in some instances to do battle analyses or weapon targeting.

The restrictions by the United States are designed mainly to prevent technology and equipment of military applications from finding their way into the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries.

The US Government has been the most hawkish so far, but a new agreement reached last month now threatens to make the problem more serious. Fifteen western countries that act together under the Paris-based Coordination Committee (CoCom) were badgered by the US last month into agreeing on much wider export restrictions. The signatory countries included Japan.

The problem will become more serious for another reason: officials in Delhi say that a new American decision means that even spare parts for computers already installed in India by American com-

...ases will now have to be cleared offfi... ...ally for export. This means that ...hundreds of computers in India run the ...risk of not getting spare parts in time, and ...computers could be down for months ...until clearance comes. Alternatively, a ...number of computers could get cannibalised in order to provide spare parts for ...others—at a heavy cost.

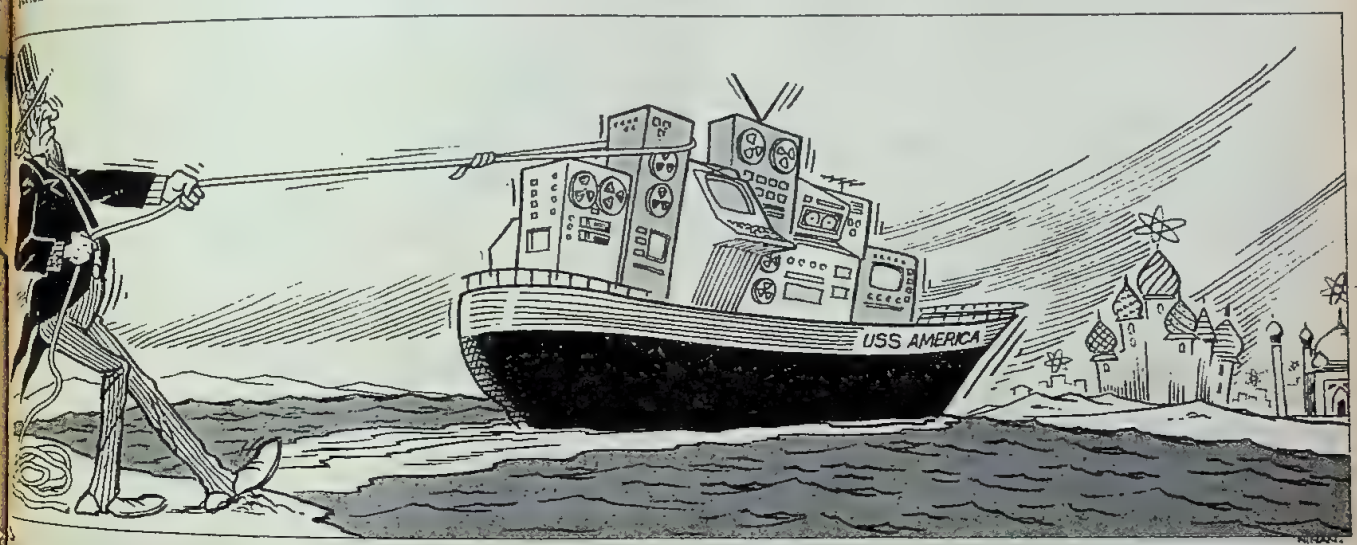
Also, the head of one technology-intensive company in India said, "Even ...American universities are now being scrutinised by the US Government, and it has become difficult to get computer software ...even from them. Sometimes, they need ...government clearance to allow non-American citizens to attend seminars."

per cent of the licence applications get misplaced in the shuffle between (the department of) commerce and the Pentagon (department of defence)."

Inevitably, India has been finding it difficult to strike deals with American companies. Silicon, for instance, is required critically for both the electronics industry (to manufacture chips) and for solar energy, but the country has been finding itself up against US curbs and a virtual American stranglehold on the technology.

This is one of the reasons for government decisions to go in for such projects as the NSF in Baroda and the Semiconductor Complex Ltd (SCL) outside Chandigarh, is compounded by the country's low credibility with the big US corporations. The ouster of IBM in 1977 still rankles. So it is frequently the companies themselves who do not want to deal with India. The problem becomes even more serious when American companies get tired of the official delegations that arrange for repeated rounds of negotiations, and still fail to take a decision.

Low credibility is one reason for the poor response to the government's global tender for manufacturing mainframe computers in India. Neither IBM nor a number of other leading computer companies responded. Those in the running now are both second-rung companies:



CoCom dates back many years—its ...an agreement on computer export curbs ...was signed in 1976—but many of today's ...American restrictions are the results of a ...committee that went into the issue under ...President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. ...Set up to look into the danger of US technological secrets finding their way to the Soviet Union, the committee said in its report that American companies could not be trusted with keeping security considerations in mind when booking orders from East Europe.

President Ronald Reagan then took ...action by setting up a special cell in ...Washington to scrutinise all sensitive ...deals...and the ambit of products and ...technologies has got progressively wider. ...Officials in Delhi complain that "the ...bureaucrats in Washington who scrutinise these contracts seem to have learnt their lessons from us: they delay matters, ask all kinds of questions, and stipulate unreasonable conditions". In a recent article on the subject, the American business magazine *Fortune* also quoted an industry lobbyist in Washington as saying that "six

both in the public sector. On purely economic considerations, neither project is likely to be viable, because the production runs are not big enough, or the domestic demand large enough, to enable economies of scale that bring costs down to international levels. But in both instances, the Government has decided to go ahead because an industrial and technological strategy based on self-reliance has become unavoidable.

BUT EVEN these projects have required American technical collaborations, which in turn require US Government clearance. In the case of SCL, the tie-up with the Californian company American Microsystems Inc (AMI) was finally cleared, while in the case of NSF the Hemlock deal is hopefully going to be cleared. Also, in one of the happier decisions recently, AMI has been allowed to give SCL its "source data"—the heart of the software needed for the computer-aided design of chips.

In India's case, the problem of getting up-to-date technology and equipment

Honeywell and CDC. Similarly, SCL was negotiating with Intel, the world's leading manufacturer of microprocessor chips, but the deal fell through after IBM acquired some 30 per cent of Intel's shareholding and suspended further negotiations. SCL eventually had to settle for relatively inferior microprocessor technology from Rockwell International. A second giant in the microprocessor field, Motorola, was not interested because the Government had talked to it repeatedly about a collaboration with SCL till Motorola lost patience. Similarly, experts argue that India may be getting second-rate technology in related fields in electronics, including components like connectors.

Meanwhile, the fear of US reprisals is now strong enough in India's decision-making circles for the government to have turned down an east European offer of technology to make hyper-pure silicon at NSF. As one member of the committee that was negotiating a collaboration explained: "If we had gone in for East German technology, the US Government would have refused American collabora-





View of BARC complex: restricted option

tions in numerous related projects and products on the grounds that a member of the Warsaw Pact would have access to these facilities." In fact, the US embassy in Delhi stays remarkably well informed about visits to sensitive project sites by east European delegations, and has asked officials about technology leaks that such visits might entail.

THE GOVERNMENT has responded to the US curbs by inserting in all contracts for sensitive items with American companies a clause saying the deal is void if US government clearance does not come through in three months. Said an official: "We find that this has worked well because the American companies then lobby especially hard in Washington to ensure that even delays in getting the clearance do not occur."

However, there are also officials who see the changing and hardening attitude of the US Government as a factor that can be turned to the country's advantage. One of them argued: "We were forced to be self-reliant in our atomic energy and space programmes, and we have successfully met these challenges. In electronics too, we can now try to be self-reliant, and the country will gain in the long run."

There have been unexpected benefits too: in the case of the BARC computers, where the US Government put its foot down, the order was finally placed with a Norwegian firm, Norskdata System, which supplied computers that turned out to be 10 per cent cheaper than the elusive VAX system and 20 per cent more powerful. Said an official: "BARC is very happy, and we have decided as a matter of policy to diversify our computer purchases. The problem today is serious because 90 per cent of the large computers in the country are of American make."

This loss of orders for American companies could also build up pressure in Washington, with American companies pointing out that the US Government's tough stance is hitting their exports, while rivals from other countries make hay. But, as an Indian official pointed out, rival offers in such situations are in some cases made at an exorbitant price, so that India too pays heavily.

One company head also argued that technology acquisition would become a broad-range problem because most technology-intensive industries are becoming increasingly oligopolistic. With technology becoming more sophisticated and the costs of research and development proving exorbitant, only two or three companies in any field can afford to stay in the technology race. Inevitably, such a situation narrows the choice available for a technology buyer like India, and makes the task of technology acquisition that much more difficult. This trend in high technology industries is now combined with the CoCom and American restrictions to make for a new set of problems in a host of sunrise industries.

—T.N. NINAN







DISCOVERING HIMACHAL VI

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FOREIGN TRADE

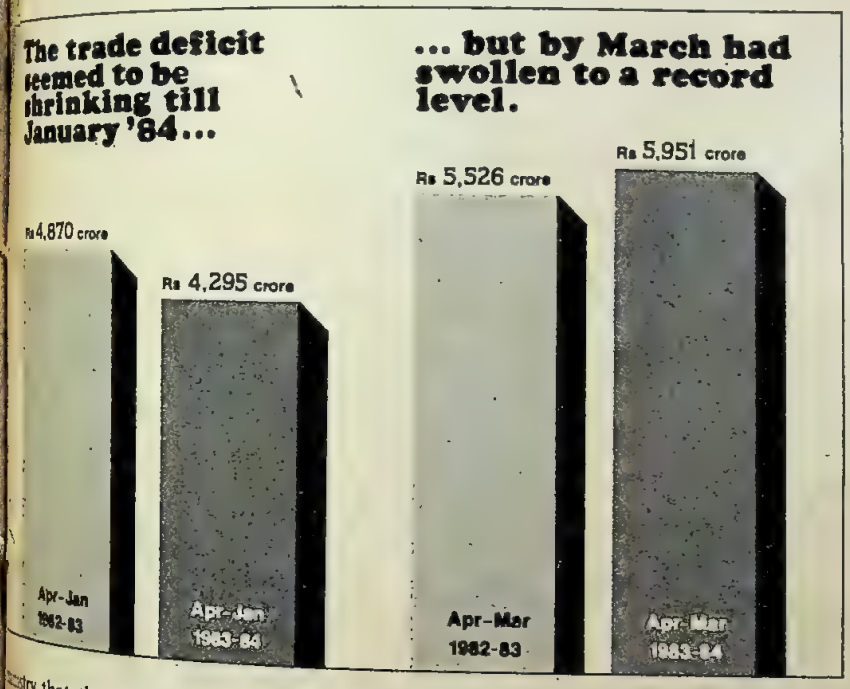
The Imbalancing Act

IN ECONOMICS, as in politics, forecasts can boomerang. This was starkly demonstrated last month when the Government announced an all-time record trade deficit of Rs 5,951 crore for 1983-84, up sharply from the earlier estimate of Rs 5,000 crore. As recently as May, Commerce Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh had told the Parliamentary Consultative Committee attached to his ministry that the deficit for the first 10 months of last year was only Rs 4,295 crore, encouragingly less than the Rs 4,870 crore in the same period of the year before. But just two months later, the full year's deficit had shot well ahead of the 1982-83 figure.

The Government's rosy expectations ended with a 35 per cent surge in the monthly rate of imports in the last quarter of the year, while exports finally ended at Rs 9,396 crore, well short of the Rs 10,500 crore target. And a red-faced Government was caught unprepared by the sudden somersault of figures.

The Government trots out a number of explanations for the bad news: the port strike in the second half of March held back Rs 600 crore worth of exports while essential imports managed to continue coming in, and the slight devaluation of the rupee during the year inflated the deficit by Rs 150 crore. Bunched imports of bulk commodities towards the year-end also suddenly inflated the import bill. Said a government official: "Without these factors, the deficit would have been closer to Rs 5,000 crore."

Other factors advanced for the poor trade showing include the global trade slump (which affected exports), the time lag that is inevitable before various export incentives show results, and the industrial revival after November, which caused manufacturers to resort to larger raw material imports to feed production. Some stockpiling of imported goods may also have taken place in anticipation of the port workers' strike and owing to fears that the era of liberal imports may be drawing to a close.



Inevitably, the record deficit raised questions about the wisdom of the relaxed foreign trade policy that the Government has followed in recent years. The deficit has now run at over Rs 5,500 crore annually for four years in a row, while the export boom that was expected to flow from a host of concessions has simply not materialised. In the last three years, exports have risen by less than Rs 3,000 crore, while imports have surged by about as much despite a drop in the oil import bill. In fact, oil—Bombay High crude is exported in swap deals for petroleum and petroleum products—has contributed more than a third of the total export growth since 1980-81, so that the non-oil export picture looks even bleaker. Even officials who are in favour of the liberal foreign trade policy admit that the export performance has been disappointing.

The Government's response to the final trade figure was swift. V.P. Singh asked his officials for an ambitious export figure for the current year and the Government announced the setting up of a committee under the chairmanship of Commerce Secretary Abid Hussain to examine the effectiveness of export promotion measures and suggest changes in import policy so as to conserve foreign exchange. Also, the policy approach paper to the seventh plan, declared that "the policy of import liberalisation needs to be kept under constant vigilance," and called for promoting industrial projects that had a low import content.

However, officials were quick to scotch speculation about a change in import and export policies. Said a senior Finance Ministry official: "I do not want to second-guess what the committee that has been set up will say, but I don't think there will be a sharp change."

The immediate question now is the likely trade performance during the current year. The export target, at Rs 11,127 crore, is an ambitious 18.5 per cent more than last year's figure, but this includes Rs 600 crore worth of exports that were held back in March because of the port strike. G. Chandrakant, secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, says the export goal "is a reachable target"—because of the emphasis on agricultural products in the year's export policy, the pick-up in overseas demand for carpets and garments, the boom in the spices market, the good tea outlook, and the steady progress being notched up under the scheme for setting up 100 per cent export units.

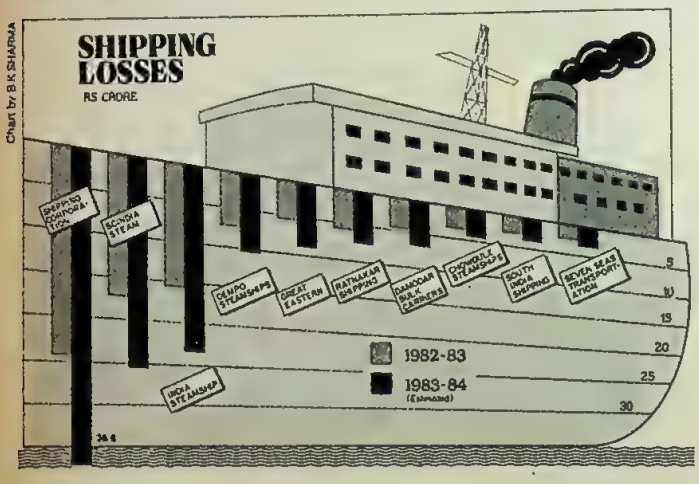
Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the trade deficit will stay at over Rs 5,000 crore this year as well, and that after taking credit for remittances from Indians abroad and other similar inflows, the "current account" deficit will be about Rs 2,500 crore—1.25 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Officials talk of bringing this down to 1 per cent of GDP by the end of the seventh plan, in 1989-90, but even this will entail rising foreign debt and a sharp increase in the debt servicing burden. The overall official assessment: the situation is not critical, but some tightrope walking will be called for.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

SHIPPING

Panic Stations

THE LAST decade has seen world shipping stagger through particularly trying times, and Indian companies have borne their share of the knocks. But there is a limit to endurance, and the signs last month were that the limit was close to being reached. The bells rang for panic stations amid reports that the Government had refused further assistance to private shipping, and even that it was thinking of putting on Shylock's robes and attaching the ships of companies unable to pay back loans. In all the this one fact was starkly clear: the 70-odd Indian shipping companies which run 405 ships—total gross registered tonnage (GRT) 6.14 million tonnes—were in deep waters.



It has developed into a classic no-win scenario: debts to the tune of Rs 1,600 crore, earnings which do not cover even half of operating costs, an ageing fleet unable to compete on equal terms with other countries' modern fuel-efficient vessels, and the considerable handicap of ill-equipped home ports. Two years ago, 13 big companies who among themselves own 90 per cent of Indian tonnage posted losses of Rs 111.5 crore; in 1983-84 the figure is expected to have touched Rs 164 crore. Only two companies, Great Eastern Shipping Company and Essar Bulk Carriers, were said to be keeping their heads above water as far as operating profits went. "Unless something drastic is done," said Vasant Sheth, chairman of Great Eastern, "Indian shipping is going to sink very quickly."

Only a handful of companies have actually closed down or stopped operating so far—like the tiny Panchsheel Shipping, which ran three ships with a total of 8,000 GRT. But the industry feels it cannot hold out any longer without substantial concessions in the form of a moratorium on loans, cargo support, and the relaxation of rules which cause delays.

Industry sources say the Government has spent the best part of two-and-a-half years preparing so-called viability reports which embarrassed everybody because, in the words of a senior company executive, "they showed that, given the ordinary banker's calculation of profit and loss and loans due, not a single company was viable". What is more, the Government is in the same leaky boat as the industry: the Shipping Development Fund Committee (SDFC) was started in 1958 to provide soft loans and has now financed 90 per cent of Indian tonnage. The total loans and guarantees provided by it amount to a colossal Rs 3,500 crore. Officials are said to have worked out that even after selling off the ships of defaulting companies, Rs 700 crore would still have to be written off.

Much of Indian shipping's problems are a reflection of the world-wide depression which last year led to 30 per cent of the global tanker fleet and nearly 10 per cent of the bulk carrier fleet being laid up. Before the latest three-year decline, there was one good year in 1980, which had followed a four-year slump. Freight rates today are less than half those of 1980. Comments Surrendra Dempo, vice-chairman and managing director of Dempo Steamships: "A pattern of longer periods of recession and shorter periods of boom has come to stay."

However, quite a few of Indian shipping's problems are home-made. For one, the fleet is old: its average age, reckoned in number of units, is over 11 years, with more than half the tonnage built before 1974. About 38 per cent of the fleet is over 15 years old. In comparison, the Norwegian fleet's average age is six years. Age is important: ships built after 1980 consume only two-thirds of the fuel that an equivalent ship of an earlier vintage would. Says Vice-Admiral M.P. Awati, president of Tolani Shipping: "Fuel oil costs account for 60 per cent of operating cost prices have multiplied eight times in eight years."

Shipping companies have also been hamstrung by government regulations. Permission to buy or sell ships takes months, an order for a ship placed with a foreign shipyard has to be matched by an order with an Indian yard even if the price quoted is twice as high, liners can't go in search of the lucrative routes because they are licensed for a particular route, and the ports in the country are congested, overmanned and under-mechanised. Finally, Indian shipping companies do not get the kind of cargo subsidies that other governments offer to their ships.



"Unless something drastic is done Indian shipping is going to sink very quickly."

—VASANT SHETH, chairman, Great Eastern

Says Salmaan Moolobhoy, chairman of Indoceanic Shipping Company: "When the freight rates on one route become unremunerative, you cannot shift to another one." And J.D. Mehta, Shipping Corporation of India (SCI's) executive director, complains that "at Indian ports ships become floating godowns, incurring invisible losses".

On a very clouded scene, however, there is also the occasional silver lining. Despite the depression, the industry has never stopped expanding, more than doubling tonnage in the last decade. And now scrap prices have risen 40 per cent in six months, while 21 companies have got permission to scrap vessels: some 45 are planned to be scrapped over the next year, which means a drop in uneconomic tonnage. Also, a world trade recovery seems to be on the cards, although how much of its benefits will come to India's shipping is debatable.

On one point there is no dispute. Indian shipping cannot be left flounder ing however old and weary it might be. But whether the Government will concede the demands for financial leniency and introduce basic policy changes in the operational guidelines is something that no one, either in Government or out of it, is willing to predict.

—JAGANNATH DUBASH

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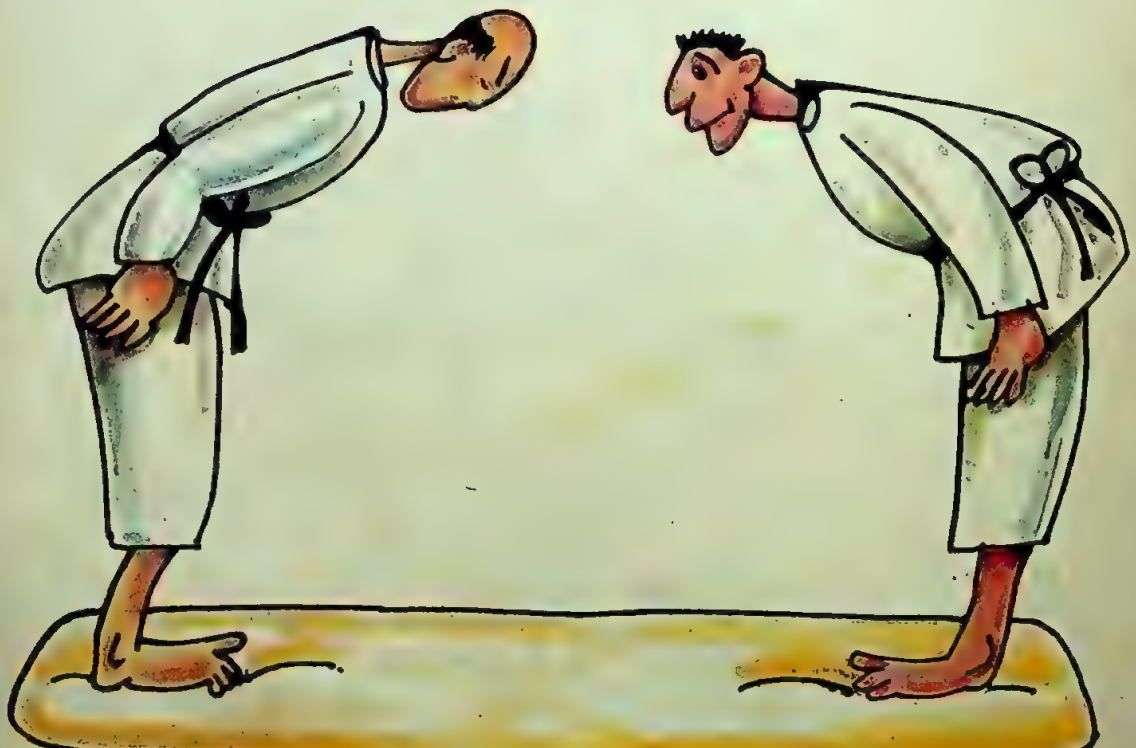
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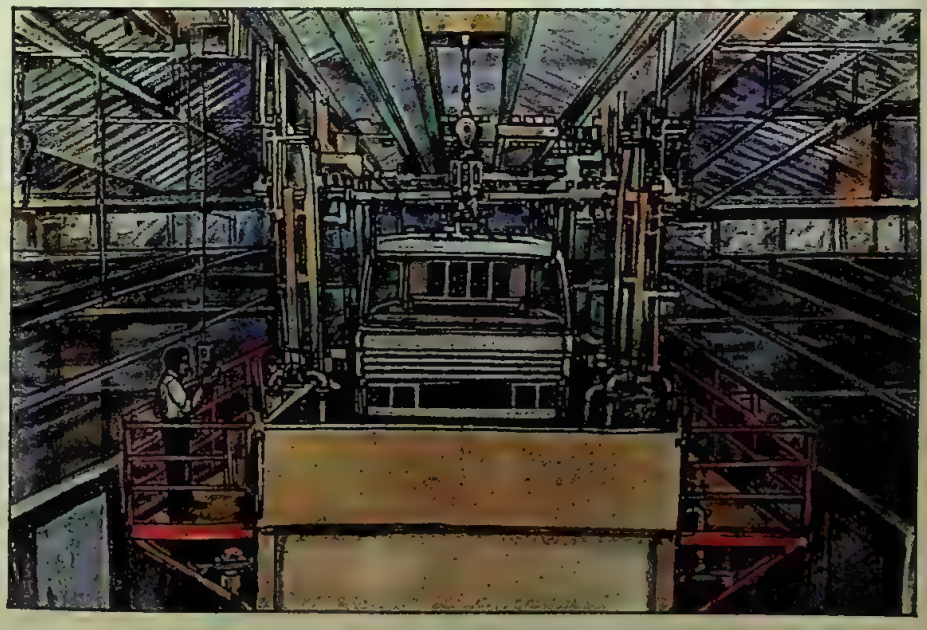
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CHEMISTS

Overdue Prescription

WITH an estimated 1.3 lakh drugstore owners willing to jump each time he gives the call, Kishor R. Shah is arguably the most powerful retail trader in the country. Last fortnight the president of Bombay's Retail and Dispensing Chemists Association (RDCA) emphasised this by flexing his muscles yet again. He spearheaded a nation-wide agitation by drug dealers which began with a near-total three-day shut-down of all pharmacies from July 27, then progressed to strict eight-hour working which left consumers no access to medicines after 5 p.m. and culminated in a "civil disobedience" phase when chemists refused to comply with statutory scheduled drug requirements.

Shah's bone of contention, which he articulates through the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) is a government notification which decrees that only qualified pharmacists will be allowed to sell prescription drugs. Starting next month, when Section 42 of the Pharmacy Act will be implemented country-wide, drugstore owners who do not comply will be liable to punitive fines and imprisonment. Said Shah: "Section 42 will cripple the pharmaceutical trade, I will fight night and day against it."

The AIOCD agitation was highly effective. But a few centres broke the strike on the third day—showing chinks in Shah's armour that were not visible in the earlier agitations that he has led over such issues as trade margins.

But it still remained unclear just why the druggists were so worked up. Section 42 has been on the statute books since 1948, when the Pharmacy Act was passed, and it has already been implemented in four states—Uttar Pradesh as early as 1957. Besides, a similar rule in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act has been enforced nation-wide since 1969 with the result that few pharmacies in the country today lack a qualified pharmacist.

Nor was Shah's militant stand supported by professional organisations which represent the pharmacists themselves. The Indian Pharmaceuticals Association, Graduate Pharmacists Association, Hospital Pharmacists Association and a host of smaller representative bodies have sent memoranda to the Government urging that the 36-year deadlock on Section 42 be finally resolved. Time and again since 1948 the Government has been persuaded by drug traders to defer its implementation, and many pharmacists argued last fortnight that professional ethics in the drug trade would never be raised unless a statutory responsibility to hire competent persons was imposed.

Members of the AIOCD insist that the current move to enforce Section 42 is impractical and unworkable. They argue that there are not enough qualified pharmacists to go around, that experienced shop assistants who do not hold a diploma in pharmacy will be made forcibly redundant and that the output of pharmacy colleges is so low that more than half the country's drugstores will have to down their shutters.

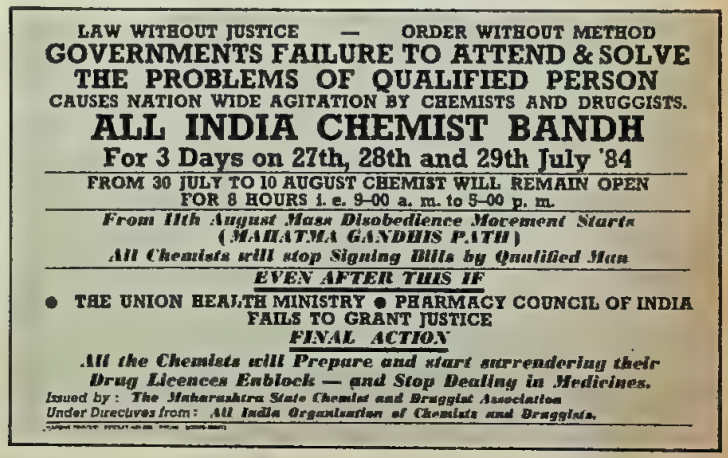
The available data, however, does not support these contentions. A detailed note released by the Pharmacy Council of India, a statutory body which regulates the profession, pointed out that the number of registered pharmacists in the country was about 2 lakh, and 150 colleges were training close to 7,500 more every year. Moreover, Pharmacy Council President V.C. Sane set at rest traders' qualms that unqualified shop assistants would be rendered jobless when he clarified that each shop would need only one pharmacist in order to supervise and control the sales of prescription drugs. Said Sane: "We only wish to enforce the spirit of the law, which is that dangerous and toxic drugs with serious side-effects should not be dispensed by persons who are not aware of these things."

Faced this time by a more determined government than in the past there were signs by fortnight's end that the AIOCD's united resistance was beginning to falter. Gujarat State Chemists Association President Ambubhai Patel led a rebellion in the ranks when he pulled his supporters out of the agitation, and there were indications that Karnataka and New Delhi chemists would follow suit.

Starting with only a handful of supporters in Bombay's Ghatkopar suburb, Shah's carefully built national organisation of chemists has had significant collective bargaining successes in the past: traders' retail and wholesale margins on non-essential drugs were boosted by 50 per cent after selective product boycotts last year, and the schedule for psychotropic drugs has been effectively stalled in Maharashtra thanks to RDCA resistance. But the indications last fortnight were that the agitation over Section 42 may turn out to be a major setback for Shah. If that turns out to be the case, he is unlikely to get any sympathy from the consumers who were starved of drugs for three days last month.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH




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Customers at a government cooperative (left) and a poster announcing the bandh

LOHIA MACHINES

Corporate Juggling

THE BREAK had been planned for months. And when last month it went public, eyebrows were raised in Delhi, Kanpur and Bombay. Sitaram Singhania, president of J.K.Synthetics (turnover: Rs 255 crore in 1982) and the man who had built the synthetic fibre industry's high-flier brick by brick, caused ripples of comment in corporate circles when he put in his papers and climbed aboard the Kanpur-based Lohia Machines (1983 turnover: Rs 23 crore) as managing director. Brother Lalit Kumar Singhania migrated to Lohia Machines at the same time from the presidentship of the Kanpur-based J.K. Cotton Spinning and Weaving Mills Co. Ltd (turnover: Rs 30 crore in 1981). So did brother-in-law Balkrishna Shriya.

The surprise moves took on the air of a classic corporate coup with the simultaneous resignation from the Lohia Machines board of the Lohia brothers, managing director Rishab Kumar Lohia and director Gopal Chandra Lohia. The rumour mills promptly began working overtime. Had Sitaram and Lalit Singhania, both only distantly related to the main branch of the Singhania family, been ousted from the JK Singhania group to make way for members of the main family? Or had the two brothers organised their own little coup in Lohia Machines, edging out the Lohia brothers, to whom they are related as first cousins?

The truth, if one believes the Singhanias was quite different. Sitaram and Lalit chose to leave their companies voluntarily, and the Lohias left Lohia Machines equally voluntarily. The Lohias in fact own almost as small a stake in Lohia Machines as Sitaram Singhania does in J.K. Synthetics or Lalit in J.K.Cotton, while Sitaram along with Lalit and youngest brother Deepak (who has been with Lohia Machines since its inception in 1972) own 32 per cent of the company's shares.

Sitaram said: "I and my brother Lalit are joining Lohia Machines in response to a call from the family"—which felt the company needed the involvement of two seasoned hands to handle its burst of expansion from a Rs 23 crore company to a Rs 500 crore colossus in a time-crunching five years. The Lohias opted out at the same time because Lohia Machines had just crossed the Rs 20 crore asset figure, bringing it into the dragnet of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act. And they have their own small enterprises to run: a new mini-cement plant, an engineering unit and a string of small enterprises in Kanpur. Continued

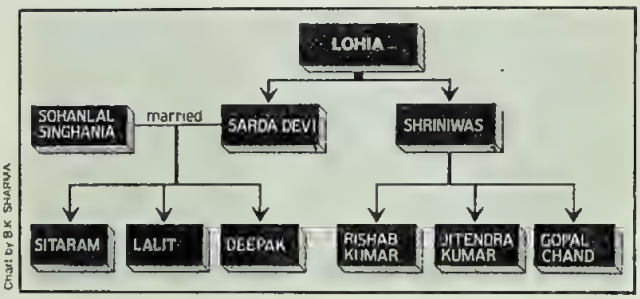


Chart by B.K. SHARMA


HARI OM GULATI

"I and my brother Lalit are joining Lohia Machines in response to a call from the family."

—SITARAM SINGHANIA

association with Lohia Machines would have brought these small companies too into the MRTP net, which the Lohias wanted definitely to avoid.

Everyone involved was therefore busy last fortnight scotching rumours of rifts among the families involved. Sitaram flew to Bombay to reassure anxious financial institutions that nothing was amiss, and Gaur Hari Singhania, who is chairman of both J.K.Synthetics and J.K.Cotton, told INDIA TODAY: "Sitaram and Lalit have left because Lohia Machines had grown beyond their expectations."

The big question now is how J.K. Synthetics will fare without Sitaram, and whether J.K.Cotton will continue to prosper without Lalit. Sitaram built the company from a one tonne per day plant back in 1961 to a 90 tonne unit today, the largest in the industry, apart from having overseen its diversification into cement and engineering and even managed avoiding paying taxes on profits between 1977 and 1982.

Lalit's record is no less remarkable. Under his management, J.K.Cotton is now the only textile unit in Kanpur that has not fallen sick and been swallowed up by the public sector National Textile Corporation. Will both companies continue to do as well in the future? Chairman Gaur Hari has no doubts on this score: "Both companies will continue to prosper", he said.

The challenge at Lohia, meanwhile, measures up to Sitaram's and Lalit's abilities. Started 12 years ago, the company has been successful both in yarn processing and the manufacture of yarn processing machinery. But the company remained small until two years ago, when it divesified into nylon chips (the raw material for yarn) and scooters.

Lohia has implemented the projects quickly, and got further licences to set up a three-wheeler plant and two more scooter plants, the latter under a joint venture umbrella with Piaggio. So the company is on the threshold of unprecedented growth. Over-all, the group must get ready to produce 3.5 lakh vehicles annually — more than any company does today. And Deepak Singhania says: "I felt at this stage that the company needed the experience and guidance of my brothers. So I asked them to join the family concern".

With two-wheeler industry leader Rahul Bajaj breathing down their necks and gearing up his own production lines to turn out 4.6 lakh vehicles annually, the race for dominance in the scooter market is clearly on. Both companies have miles long queues of hopeful customers, but Lohia's scooter production, started last December, has been at a halting pace because of power supply problems and the poor quality of goods supplied by vendors. These have to be ironed out, and the two new projects implemented quickly lest Bajaj steal a march over them. So the Singhania brothers certainly have their new jobs cut out for them.

—PALAKUNNATHU G.MATHAI

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Battle of the Baggage

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"Our competitors are just panicking."

—DILIP PIRAMAL
Chairman, Blow Plast



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—JAL ENGINEER
proprietor, Universal Luggage

Recognition of Aristocrat's new-found status as brand leader came from a rather unlikely quarter last fortnight. Launching its first new baggage range in many years, named Concorde, Blow Plast challenged itself in the sincerest form of flattery—the new bags were surprisingly similar to Universal's successful brand name Aces. By mid-August, newspapers across the country were studded with boldly worded notices warning retailers not to stock imitations of the Aristocrat line, followed by counter-advertisements from Blow Plast, which argued that the Concorde design was in fact inspired by an existing VIP mini brief-case. Said an unamused Jal Engineer: "How could they stoop so low? Blow Plast has not launched a single new mould design for their suitcases since I lost control 11 years ago, and now when they finally launch a design it turns out to be a ditto copy of our most successful range."

Blow Plast Chairman Dilip Piramal did not deny that the Concorde luggage was remarkably like his competitor's Super Aces, but argued that suitcase designs world-wide were so similar to each other that no manufacturer could lay claim to exclusive use of a design. "There is no infringement by us even if they have registered this design," he said. "I think the fact is that our competitors are just panicking, and their advertisements are an attempt to scare off some naive dealers."

Whatever the merits of the charges and countercharges, it was clear last fortnight that the acrimonious fight was only the latest round of a bitter war for the top slot in the moulded luggage industry. Sales figures rocketed from just over Rs 1 crore in 1973 to Rs 80 crore 11 years later, and Jal Engineer was driven by a determination to become industry leader once again. He set up Universal in 1975, and the luggage market has been a long battle for supremacy since then.

By mid-1984 a series of expansions had pushed Aristocrat sales to Rs 30 crore, against Rs 36 crore sales of luggage by Blow Plast (which also sells Rs 4 crore worth of Leo toys and Moderna plastic chairs) and Rs 11 crore by former Blow Plast executive Sumati Chandra Mehta's Safari industries. When the production figures for July rolled in last fortnight, Engineer's Universal was indisputably ahead of the rest of the gang with a 42 per cent share of out put against Blow Plast's 40 per cent.

Universal's growth will not end here: when the company's new plant at Paithan achieves full production in October, its share of the market will top 45 per cent, and a fourth new plant near Aurangabad will boost the company's manufacturing capacity to almost twice its nearest rival by next April. Universal's Managing Director, Shashi Das, projects sales for 1984–85 at Rs 50 crore, and a 50 per cent annual growth rate after that.

To sell its massive increases in output the company has had to resort increasingly to price-cutting resulting in a regular discount war between the manufacturers. Moulded luggage manufacturers have always offered dealers incentives and discounts over and above the 20 per cent trade margin on the listed prices, but discounting in the last six months has gone as high as 25 per cent on dealer prices. Piramal and Safari's Joint Managing Director Amul Mehta bemoaned the fact that the "elite" luggage industry has been reduced to advertising price cuts to record customers, and even Das admitted that this had begun to hurt profitability.

For Engineer himself, however, the fight has been worth any loss in profit it might have entailed with the triumph of proving himself one up on Piramal more than making up for the struggle since 1973. Coming out of the reclusive shell which made him shun the press for years, the self-made technocrat last fortnight gloated over his victory. "VIP's are made and unmade, but aristocrats are born." he quipped. "That's the difference between Dilip Piramal and me."

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

THE MARKETS

Bleak Future

The markets have been shedding a point a day since the newspapers began carrying stories about the election date which according to some of the birds that flock to the capital on such occasions could be anytime in November. Why elections or news about elections should upset the marketmen is anybody's guess but this happens everywhere, that is, wherever there are stock-markets and elections, and India is no exception. If the past is any guide, the share price index should shed anything between 5 and 10 percentage points between now and the election date, which should keep the bears quite happy. But the bears always overdo this election business and get into trouble later on when it is usually quite late to do anything about it.

Fortunately, or rather unfortunately for the bears, the monsoon has not been up to its usual tricks and there are prospects of a good crop this year, possibly as good as last year, which should buck up many a businessman worried about the overall demand situation. Industrial production is also picking up and might improve further in the coming months provided there are no major difficulties

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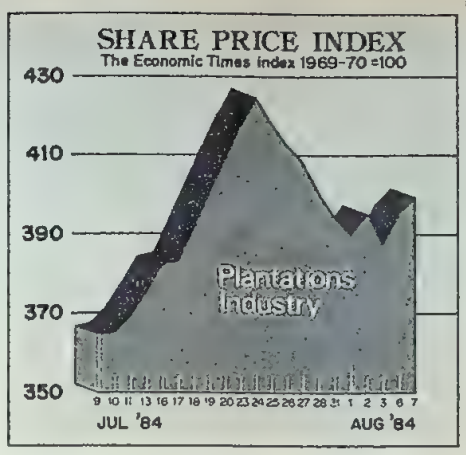
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ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 2.8.84	Change on fortnight
Amrutanjan Sarabhai	14.75	10.75	11.25	1.75 –
Apollo	62.50	48.00	62.00	nil
Ashok Leyland	37.50	28.00	29.00	0.50 –
Associated Cement	381.50	298.50	358.00	nil
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.25	33.00	1.00 +
Balarpur	53.30	43.90	43.90	2.20 –
Bombay Rayon	295.00	243.00	257.00	4.50 –
BSP	49.00	38.50	44.00	2.00 –
Bush India	48.25	33.30	38.50	2.10 +
Bharat Commerce	20.55	15.90	16.45	0.55 –
Birla Jute	62.50	52.85	53.70	0.40 +
Bow Plast	48.50	41.00	43.00	nil
Bue Star	34.00	29.50	32.00	1.00 –
Calcutta Dyeing	72.00	62.00	63.00	1.50 –
Calcutta	67.00	45.00	62.00	1.00 –
Carnatia Industries	40.60	33.60	37.00	0.70 +
Cable Bond	45.00	34.10	41.25	3.05 –
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	810.00	12.50 –
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	47.00	0.50 –
Coats of India	30.87	26.50	28.00	nil
Cochin	115.00	100.00	107.00	8.00 –
Cromwell	45.50	32.00	34.50	4.50 –
CSP	76.12	47.37	50.87	2.88 +
Dalmia	28.20	25.00	25.20	1.00 –
Delta India Hotels	40.25	29.00	39.50	0.50 +
Escorts	56.50	31.00	56.50	5.50 +
Essars	76.00	52.75	53.37	1.13 –
Fluid Specialities	92.00	69.00	87.75	2.75 –
Gas Carbon	25.00	15.00	15.50	0.50 –
Geo Keen Williams	23.20	20.30	22.00	1.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	47.75	47.75	1.50 –
Herdillia Chemicals	25.00	20.50	23.50	nil
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	44.00	48.70	0.80 +
Hindustan Cocoa	55.00	31.00	52.50	2.00 –
Hindustan Lever	58.50	48.00	49.50	2.75 –
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	43.90	1.28 –
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.00	24.50	1.35 +
Indian Cable	24.10	20.40	22.75	nil
Indian Explosives	28.00	25.00	26.10	0.70 –
Indian Organic	37.50	31.00	37.50	0.75 +
Indian Oxygen	38.25	33.00	35.25	0.95 –
ITC Synthetics	75.50	54.50	61.50	0.50 –
Kelvinator	48.00	39.00	42.00	1.30 –
Lakshmi Cotton	94.00	42.00	48.00	0.50 +
Lloyds Engineering	61.60	47.50	48.70	0.10 +
Kirloskar Cummins	158.00	113.00	153.50	0.50 +
Lucas TVS (Madras)	550.00	407.50	537.50	17.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	27.00	22.00	25.00	2.00 –
Lyka	79.50	65.00	74.00	1.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	37.75	24.50	35.50	1.10 –
Mangalam Cement	74.75	52.00	72.75	1.25 +
MRF Rubber	31.00	20.00	20.75	4.50 –
Motor Industries	30.31	24.50	27.50	1.87 –
National Organic	277.50	212.50	230.00	22.50 –
Nicco	208.25	176.50	200.00	20.00 +
Otis Elevator	37.00	32.00	37.00	nil
Premier Automobile	73.00	54.00	71.50	1.50 –
Raymond	314.00	246.00	280.00	34.00 –
Reliance	55.00	41.80	47.00	4.00 +
Shaw Wallace	123.00	110.00	113.50	3.50 –
Siemens	38.00	30.47	35.12	0.13 –
SKF	47.50	42.00	43.50	1.50 +
Sona Products	38.75	28.06	36.50	2.25 –
Tata Chemicals	57.00	43.50	45.80	0.70 –
Tata Steel	87.00	53.25	87.00	nil
Telco	326.50	245.50	318.00	8.00 –
Tennaco	428.00	395.00	395.00	14.00 –
Union Carbide	68.50	50.85	65.25	1.25 –
Usha Martin Black	28.25	24.80	27.40	1.50 –
Voltas	22.50	19.50	20.10	2.15 –
Wipro	395.00	335.00	370.00	7.00 –
20th Century Leasing	43.50	28.50	36.00	1.00 –
Unit Trust	48.00	30.75	30.75	0.75 –
	14.35	12.60	12.95	0.35 +



with the power people. There are hopeful reports of economic recovery on the international front which is another plus factor. The Government's liberal industrial policy has already led to a tremendous demand for funds and this is reflected in the state of new issues of debentures. A number of FERA companies are in the process of diluting their foreign equity, the operation being inevitably accompanied by large-scale expansion.

All stock markets are, however, accident-prone and a swing this way or that can cause an upset in the best laid plans of mice and men. At such a time, the best bets are blue chips and there is a large number to choose from. Again, if the past is any guide, the market should reach the trough a couple of weeks before the election date by which time it is generally in a good position to know which way the winds are blowing. Most scrips should therefore be shedding their fat, or some of their fat, for the next weeks, but there will always be some who will refuse to shed anything. These are the ones that will do the best after the elections, for they have stood their ground well and will do so again during the uncertain period ahead.

At any time, there is always some sector that is doing badly, and for the last couple of years, if not longer, it has been the shipping companies. Most of them are in the red and the industry as a whole is waiting to be bailed out, but not all. Great Eastern Shipping, for instance, seem to have kept its head literally above the swirling waters and is one of the few shipping shares to be quoted above par. It made a profit in 1982-83 and is reported to have repeated the performance last year. It is now diversifying into areas other than shipping and is planning to go in for offshore oil exploration. In fact there are reports that it might sink in as much as a couple of hundred crore in the new lines. Its shares is now only slightly above par.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES

August 2, 1984	LATEST	Change on month
ET Commodity Price Index*	310.3	8.8 +
Chemicals	403.7	42.0 +
Industrial Fibres	273.0	1.3 +
Metals	402.2	10.4 +
Gold, standard		
Rs per 10 gm	1955.00	15.00 +
Silver, .999		
Rs per kg	3475.00	120.00 +

SHARES

August 2, 1984

ET Share Price Index*	270.3	2.3 –
Cement	209.9	2.6 –
Chemicals	225.8	8.8 –
Engineering	460.0	9.2 +
Fertilisers	262.5	3.1 –
Paper	529.0	5.2 –

MONEY

July 6, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.6%	nil
EXIM Bank, direct loans,	9%	nil
Money Supply		2.2%
Bank Deposits		3.1%
Foreign Exchange Assets		24.1% –

* Index—1969–70 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.8077	9.8900
Austria	As SCH	100	57.8105	57.1702
Bahrain	Dinar	1	30.4767	30.2649
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.0149	45.6959
Canada	Dollar	1	8.8793	8.7855
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.1111	1.0979
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5719	9.6056
France	Franc	1	1.3210	1.3049
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.4954	1.4693
Indonesia	Ruplah	100	1.1248	1.1170
Iran	Rial	100	12.6772	12.5893
Italy	Lira	100	0.6511	0.6440
Japan	Yen	100	4.8017	4.7480
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7848	0.7793
Kuwait	Dinar	1	38.4576	38.1810
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.9768	4.9184
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8299	0.8241
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7135	0.7086
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5875	3.5286
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8240	0.8183
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.4185	5.3536
Spain	Peseta	100	7.1374	7.0099
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4580	0.4548
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3965	1.3793
Switzerland	France	1	4.8216	4.7655
Tanzania	Shilling	1	8.9630	8.8584
Thailand	Baht	100	45.1123	44.9920
UK	Pound	1	15.3834	15.7473
USA	Dollar	1	11.5950	11.4686
UAE	Dihram	1	3.1057	3.0840
USSR	Rouble	1	14.0648	13.9873
W Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.0509	4.0071

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 6 August 1984.

Now! Slow cook tasty meals while you're out all day



A big bonus for working housewives.

Here is at last a product that will cook slowly, safely, surely while you're at work all day. The Twink Simmermatic Cuisinette. The modern electric slow cooker.

Equally slowly, safely, surely, the Simmermatic will cook all through the night while you sleep easy, knowing that tomorrow's morning meal will be piping hot and ready when you wake up.

Although it is specially useful for women working in offices, the Simmermatic is a boon for any busy housewife.

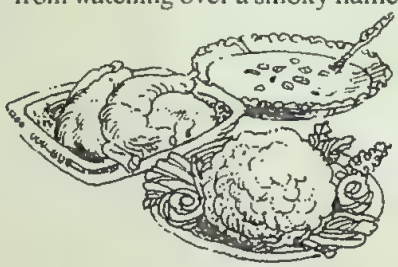
Slow cooking time: 1 hour to 14 hours.

The Simmermatic is not an electric pressure cooker. Advertisements for one electric pressure cooker tell you to switch on and go—but don't tell you that if you are not back within an hour or two you will get stone cold, unappetising food.

With the Simmermatic you can choose recipes and temperature settings from the cook book according to your preference of dishes and the time you like to be away. The thermostat will automatically control the heat to the required level, gently cooking a tasty meal and keeping it simmering for your return.

The taste of cooking over a slow fire.

Because the Simmermatic simmers food for hours and hours, the results approximate the delicious dishes cooked by granny in the traditional way, over a slow fire—without the tears that come from watching over a smoky flame!



Tomato Soup, Channa Dal, Rajma, Sambhar, Vegetable Pulao, Rogan Josh, Chicken Casserole, Sarson Ka Saag, Kheer . . . .

The free cook book gives you full instructions and 107 recipes (61 vegetarian and 46 non-vegetarian) to get you started.

Safe and economical — Guaranteed.

The Simmermatic is as safe as your refrigerator. The design and construction is such that nothing can go wrong in its operation on its own.

Although designed to operate at 240 volts, the Simmermatic has been tested up to 270 volts for hours with no ill-effects. It is extremely unlikely that the voltage will exceed that level.

A drop in voltage cannot harm the product at any level. Simmermatic cooking has been tried out at voltages as low as 160 volts without ill-effect on food or any need to change the cooking times.

Although the Simmermatic is rated at 240 watts, because of automatic thermostatic control the average electricity consumption is as economical as a 100 watt bulb.

The Simmermatic is guaranteed for two years and should give you many more years of faithful service.

Good value at Rs. 999*.

See for yourself at the nearest dealer. In case of any difficulty, or for a free folder on the Simmermatic, write to Hawkins department 576, P.O. Box 6481. Mahim, Bombay 400 016.

*Max. recommended retail price excluding all taxes.



SIMMERMATIC
the real slow cooker

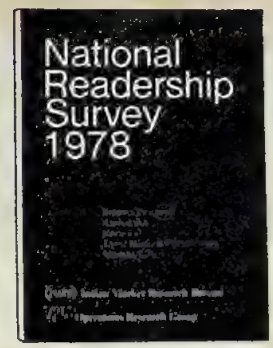
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...eye-opener



TWICE
...asserter



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Daily Thanthi	30.77	12.00	9.47	4.74
Dinamani	14.57	3.79	2.97	0.65
The Hindu	10.44	3.15	5.64	2.16
Dinamalar	7.89	1.42	—	—
Indian Express	5.22	0.73	2.07	0.41



In effect, Daily Thanthi exclusively helps you reach:

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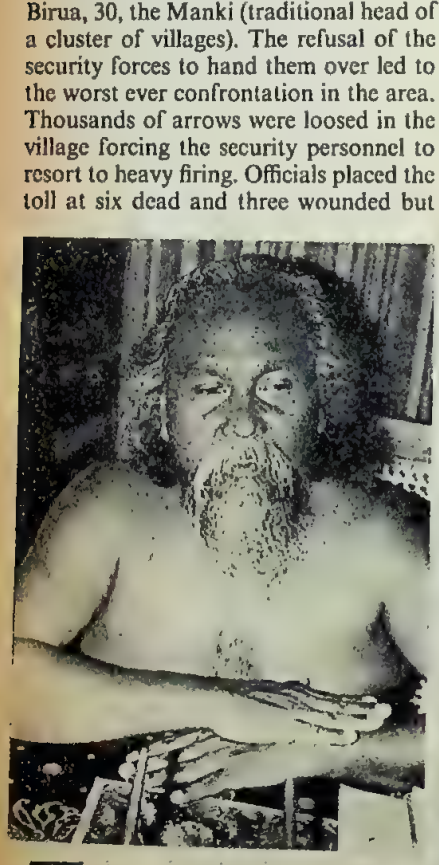
A Reign of Terror

THE DEEP interiors of Singhbhum are rapidly being lost to the forces of chaos. That no rule of law prevails in these parts was brought brutally home last month once again when a 10,000-strong mob of volunteers of the dreaded Gram Raksha Dal (GRD), ignoring the two platoons of paramilitary forces and magistrates at Bharbharia village, demanded the custody of 19 villagers including Harish Chandra Birua, 30, the Manki (traditional head of a cluster of villages). The refusal of the security forces to hand them over led to the worst ever confrontation in the area. Thousands of arrows were loosed in the village forcing the security personnel to resort to heavy firing. Officials placed the toll at six dead and three wounded but unofficial figures put the toll much higher, at 20 or more.

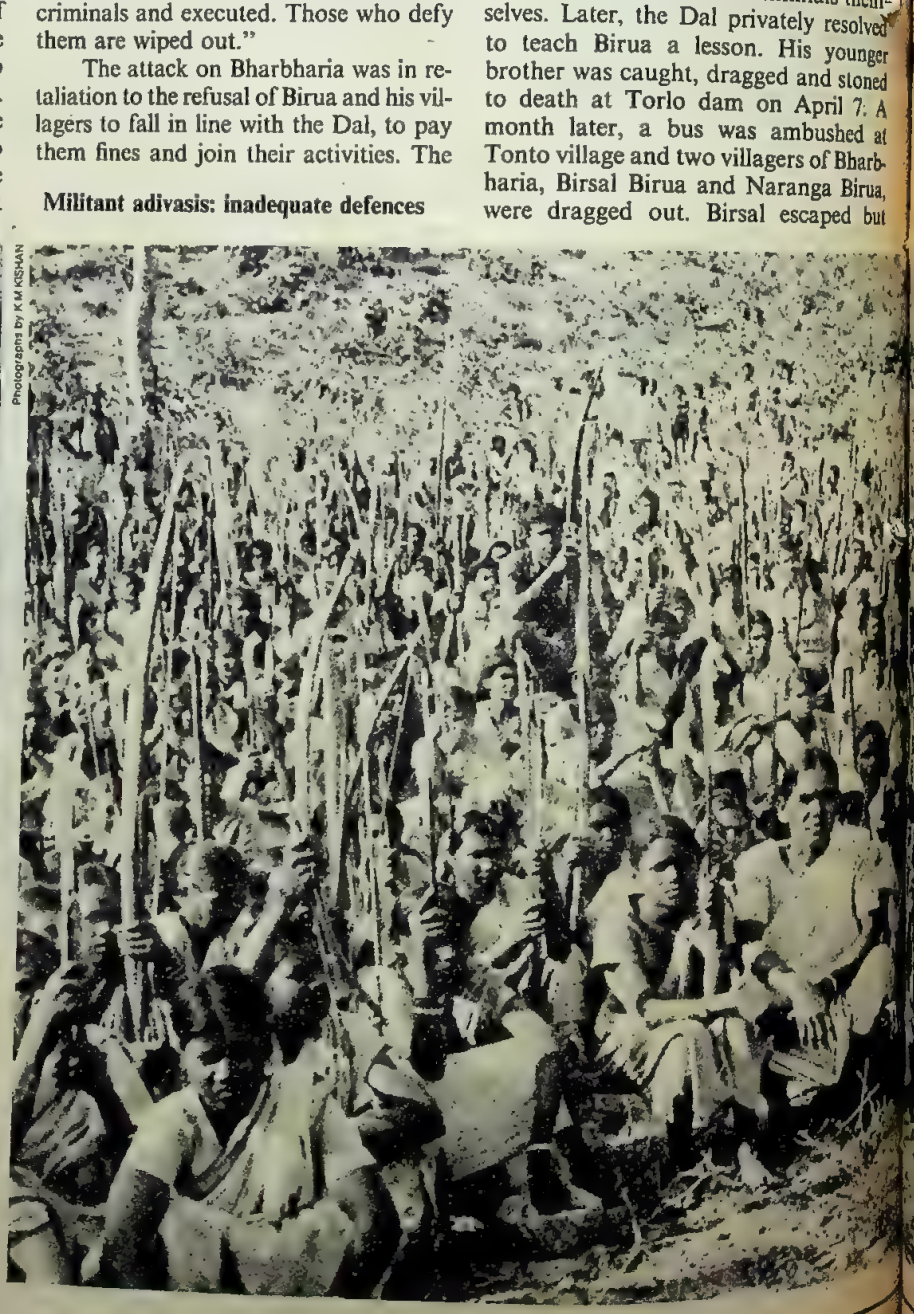
The Bharbharia incident laid bare the true colours of the Dal which was set up last September with the blessings of the local Congress(I) member of the Lok Sabha, Bagun Sumbrui, to counter the activities of criminals in the villages. Said Birua: "In fact GRD is a gang of criminals terrorising and looting the people. Those who oppose its activities are branded as criminals and executed. Those who defy them are wiped out."

The attack on Bharbharia was in retaliation to the refusal of Birua and his villagers to fall in line with the Dal, to pay them fines and join their activities. The differences began at a meeting of the Dal on March 11 held to select new targets. The organisers took a serious note of Birua's absence at the meeting. Another session was announced two weeks later. By then Birua had set up his own Shanti Morcha with the avowed objective of catching the criminals and handing them over to the police. This was in marked contrast to the Dal's open insistence to try and even execute the criminals themselves. Later, the Dal privately resolved to teach Birua a lesson. His younger brother was caught, dragged and stoned to death at Torlo dam on April 7. A month later, a bus was ambushed at Tonto village and two villagers of Bharbharia, Birsal Birua and Naranga Birua, were dragged out. Birsal escaped but

Militant adivasis: inadequate defences



Photographs by K.M. KISHAN

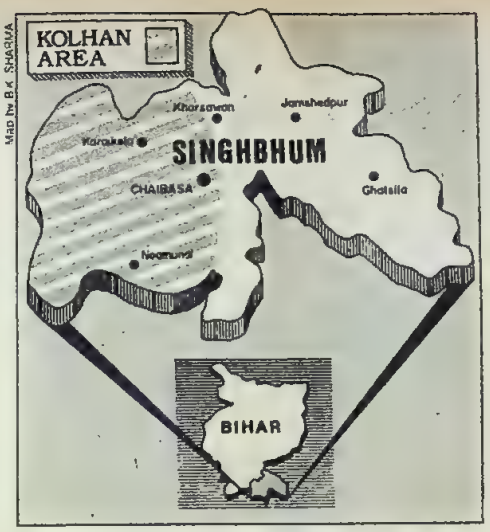


The Gram Raksha Dal might have done something wrong. Mob mentality might have worked in some cases but it is mainly the criminal who is the target.

—BAGUN SUMBRUI, Congress(I) MP

Naranga was brutally killed. Said Birsal, "I along with Naranga were made the target only because we belonged to Bharbharia village and did not join the Dal. Now we are so terrified that despite the presence of the armed police we do not step out of the village." Their fear is accentuated by the fact that before they were attacked, four others, Motilal Birua, Pragan Birua, Radhakrishna Birua (brother of the Manki) and Krishna Gopal were kidnapped and executed.

As if this was not all, the GRD has ordered a social boycott of Bharbharia. The weekly market has been closed and anybody found visiting the village or talking to the villagers is fined Rs 50. Carrying a lathi in public invites death penalty from the Dal. Youth Congress(I) leader S.R.A. Rizvi, who toured the area, says that the GRD is virtually running a parallel administration, imposing taxes, trying people through its own courts and executing its enemies. Last week's heated debate in the Rajya Sabha glossed over the activities of the Gram Raksha Dal as the members were too concerned about reports of missionary involvement in the region of terror in the tribal belt. In fact no member referred to the activities of the Congress(I) backed organisation, the Gram Raksha Dal.



The GRD was born late last year in the wake of the formation of the Kolhan Raksha Sangh which demanded the creation of a separate Kolhan nation as a member of the Commonwealth. The Sangh which sent a memorandum to the Commonwealth and observed its 'independence day' on December 2, 1981 (*see box*) struck terror in the area to enlist support by kidnapping 11 people and executing eight others last year.

Overtly the GRD was created to counter the influence of the Kolhan Raksha Sangh as it was suspected to have external links. The Dal launched its anti-crime campaign with much fanfare. Sumbrui, the colourful tribal leader was undoubtedly the brain behind the GRD. Starting off as a socialist in 1965, he had started the Jharkhand Party aimed at driving away the non-tribals from the area, then headed the "Diku Bhagao" movement and represented the area in the Assembly becoming a minister in the United Front





In fact the Gram Raksha Dal is a gang of criminals terrorising the people. Those who oppose it are branded as criminals and executed.

—HARISH CHANDRA BIRUA
Manki of Bharbharia

ministry. In 1977 he won the parliamentary seat as Janata candidate and in 1980 retained the seat only to join Congress(I) soon after. With such a past, Sumbrui ensured that his GRD got the blessings of the chief ministers as also of the administration. The then chief minister Jagannath Mishra visited Singhbhum and in a bid to contain unrest in the region backed the system of Mankis and Mundas.

With the change of the ministry, Sumbrui invited the present Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Singh to attend a public meeting on January 28. The chief minister was presented with bows and arrows which he promptly passed on to Sumbrui who then seized the opportunity to explain to the large audience in Ho language that the chief minister had approved of their anti-criminal drive. A few days before the incident, Governor A.R. Kidwai honoured Kunkal with a headgear, which gesture inspired the GRD to intensify its campaign, further demoralising the local administration. Said Singhbhum Deputy Commissioner of Police Gurmit Singh Kang: "The beginning of the GRD was very good but later it became a pawn in the hands of its leaders having political ambitions."

Sumbrui insists that even the Government had issued directives to the district administration to help form village defence forces to counter the criminals since the police were not able to cope with the law and order situation. He strongly believes that after the GRD came into being, people in the area are able to sleep soundly. Says Sumbrui: "The Dal might have done something wrong. Mob mentality might have worked in some cases but it is mainly the criminal who is the target. If innocent people have been killed in large numbers, the administration is to be blamed."

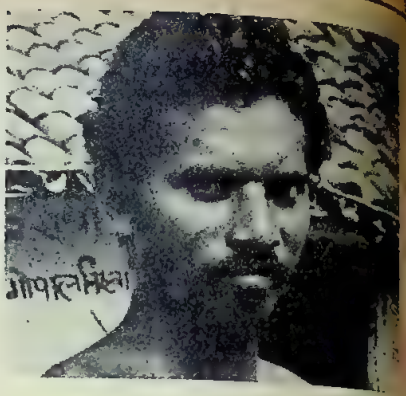
Sumbrui's claim that GRD enjoys overwhelming support of the masses is supported by Laxman Kesari, 60, of Chittimitti village under the Tantnagar block. He says there was virtual peace in the area after the GRD started killing the criminals. Giving an insight into the working of the Dal, Kesari says when a criminal is captured, he is produced before the Munda who certifies whether he is a criminal or not. If he is identified as a criminal, he is tried and executed in the jungles. There is no count of the number of people killed.

But the police assert that none of the listed criminals had been killed. R.P. Sharma, sub-inspector of police in Manjhari, says that though 24 are reported to have been killed in this block, none was a criminal. "In fact only those who oppose the activities of the Dal are executed." Sharma who survived a bullet attack recently says that according to intelligence reports, the Dal has an inner executive which tries people deep in Panchavati or Singhbhum hill areas.

Deputy Commissioner Kang says that so far 52 were reported to be missing and only 24 bodies were recovered. According to a list prepared by Kali Charan Lohra, a young man of Bharbharia, 42 people had been killed in the Manjhari area alone. One of the settlements, Dola Saran, was wiped out and many villages in the interior had been plundered.

Police Superintendent R.N. Singh admits that most of the murders were committed due to personal enmities or on charges of witchcraft. Reports at the district headquarters suggest that most members of the GRD acquired sophisticated weapons during the Bangladesh crisis. The Dal and Sangh are dominated by retired army personnel. In the two blocks, Manjhari and Tantnagar, almost every family had a member in the army.

People in the interior say that the GRD had appointed some trained "executioners" who are paid handsomely. The Conservator of Forests, R.P. Singh, revealed that according to reports from inside the jungles, some units of the GRD were working as murder squads to help the cause of the separate state. He points



We are so terrified that despite the presence of the police we do not step out of the village.

—BIRSAL BIRUA, villager of Bharbharia

KOLHANISTAN

Crown Cause

THE MOVEMENT for a sovereign Kolhanistan which suddenly erupted three years ago in Singhbhum, the tribal district of Bihar, has actually a much longer history. The roots can be traced to early 19th century when the British brought the Ho tribe directly under the rule of the Crown.

Kolhan was the home of the Lakra-Kol tribe (also known as Ho) till 1837 while three other regions across the river Sanjai—Porahat, Kharsawan and Karaikela—were ruled by Rajput chiefs (who believed the word Singhbhum was derived from their surname "Singh" and the Hos felt that it was related to "Sing-Bongs", their supreme deity). After several attempts to subjugate them by the local rajas and British troops had failed, the East India Company launched a final assault in 1821 and made the Hos submit to the three zamindars who were put in the charge and who remained unsympathetic and hostile to them.

Then in 1833 following the reorganisation of the tribal areas of Chhotanagpur plateau, Captain T. Wilkinson who became the head of the South-West Frontier Agency (SWFA) floated the idea of finally conquering the Kolhan and got a clearance from the East India Company. In 1836 British troops rampaged through the forest-infested Kolhan, repulsed the brave Hos and by early 1837 the Mankis and Mundas in all 620 villages surrendered. Chaibasa thus became the headquarters of the entire Singhbhum. Captain Wilkinson formulated rules for governing the region making allowance for the old system of rule by Mankis and Mundas—the Mankis who had under them three to 12 villages were recognised as "police chiefs and revenue collectors" with powers to settle criminal and civil cases and Mundas were known as "police officer and revenue collector" of the village under the control of the Mankis.

But the demand for a "sovereign state of Kolhan" remained in oblivion until November 1, 1977, when some educated tribals led by Narayan Jonko, Christ Anand Topno and K.C. Hembrum formed a Kolhan Raksha



Remains of Birsal Birua's house burnt down by the Dal

...that the first phase of the movement is ...truction of the jungles, followed by the ...ation of a defence movement and ...ally ending with the elimination of the ...kus (the outsiders).

Lately, the authorities have found links between the Kolhan Raksha Sangh and the Dal. Said Kang: "Earlier, it was believed that both were poles apart but recently in a raid, some clue was found which indicated the links. At least one meeting of GRD was attended by Kolhan Raksha Dal Secretary K.C. Hembrum."

Sumbrui, however, denies the link. "Kolhan Sangh is financed and supported by a foreign agency and there cannot be any connection with us," he says. But many people believe that the growth of such groups was the result of exploitation and police terror in the region. Already, the district has been in a state of "mini-emergency" as the Chaibasa-based Tribal Research and Training Centre report pointed out recently. The study said that since 1978, forest officials had filed 1,252 cases under various sections of the Forests Act implicating 5,000 tribals. Besides this, there had been 13 incidents of police firing between 1978 and 1983. In the same period, 48 villages in the jungles had been attacked and over 400 homes burnt down or destroyed. And in a bid to throttle the voice of protest, the area had been placed under prohibitory orders round the year. The result is that vast tracks of Singhbhum are currently in the grip of a range of conflicting authorities, and the result is a spate of killings that can only increase in the coming months. —FARZAND AHMED



Topno: advocating the cause



Hembrum: violent tactics



Jonko: self-styled leader

...ugh with Jonko as president and ...embrum as secretary. And on March ...1980, the Sangh organised a massive ...ly of tribals at Mangla Hat in ...Chaibasa to declare a "Kolhan state". ...e Government was stunned when the ...gaineers observed "Kolhan Day" on ...December 2, 1981 (the day Wilkinson ...rule was introduced), and then a letter ...was sent to the Commonwealth's head-...quarters in London. The letter signed by ...Narayan Jonko "chief, Government of ...Kolhan", said: "Kolhan owes allegiance ...to the Crown and the Commonwealth ...countries" inviting all heads of state to meet in Chaibasa and take steps against Indian "aggression" against Kolhan. But before the letter was sent, Jonko with Christ Anand Topno, a lawyer, and "chief legal adviser and in-charge of foreign affairs", had visited London and Geneva to present Kolhan's case.

An alarmed administration moved swiftly. The police lodged an FIR in October 1981 accusing Jonko, Topno and Hembrum besides others of launching a secessionist movement.

Topno and another lawyer Ashwani Kumar Swaiyan again visited London and Geneva. On their return they were arrested and lodged in Chaibasa jail in November 1981. Jonko disappeared in the Kolhan forest. On the other hand, the Kolhan Raksha Sangh struck terror among its opponents when a "murder squad" led by Hembrum kidnapped 11 persons from busy Tonto market-place and killed eight of them. This left a trail of terror and blood. Hembrum, a schoolteacher and unsuccessful politician, too disappeared. But Kolhan continues to prove a thorn in the Government's side and the seriousness of the problem is reflected in its comparison to the cry for Khalistan.

GOA

A Case of Antiquity

THE MYSTERY of the St Francis Xavier statue which was confiscated by the Goa police last month just as it was about to be despatched by plane to Bombay, is a puzzle which still defies solution. Is it a 300-year-old antique or a cleverly executed fake?

Panjim is sharply divided on the issue. A calling attention motion in the Goa Assembly last fortnight generated more heat than light. The two rival English dailies have taken diametrically opposite views. The *Herald* campaign stresses the statue's antiquity and claims there is a massive cover-up afoot. Equally strongly the *Navhind Times* deplores attempts to brand the statue's interception as a "smuggling case". It carried as a special scoop an interview with the craftsman Vaman Zo who claims to have carved the four-foot-five-inch wooden statue. The Marathi newspaper *Gomantak* has blacked out the story entirely, not surprisingly, considering that the statue is owned by the Chowgules, Goa's leading industrial house. Jagdish Y. Chowgule, 29, a scion of this family which deals in everything from steam ships to mines, breweries, textiles, explosives and cement, is the owner of the controversial statue.

The statue story began on the inauspicious Friday, July 13, when Panjim police were tipped off by two separate phone calls from a man and a woman that a parcel booked for a Bombay flight by a travel agency on behalf of Chowgule carried a priceless antique. Police intercepted the consignment which had been declared as an "artefact of no commercial value". The consignee and receiver were listed under the same name—'Jagdish'.

Opened the next day in the presence of Goa's Director of Archives, P.P. Shirodkar, the partial unpacking revealed a hand holding a crucifix. Shirodkar opined that the hand seemed a 300-year-old antique but the crucifix was a recent addition. The unwrapping was to be completed the following day by an experienced carpenter but the director who is also the registrar of antiques for the Union territory fell ill. The police after unpacking it, hastily despatched it to the director's office.

Before the director had recovered and had a chance to assess the statue, the news had leaked out. A string of visitors descended on the archives to examine the piece and guess its age. The massive sculpture which weighs 130 kg and is 22 inches in width and four feet five inches in length is carved, except for the hands, from a single piece of wood. It is so heavy that some even suspect that it is oak not teak.



The statue of St Francis and (inset) Vaman Zo who says he made it

There is extra interest in the statue of St Francis since this is the year of his exposition when his preserved body will be put on display to the public.

Several priests feel that it is an old altar piece and the vicar general of Goa has asked all parish priests to make an inventory of their images and report if any are missing. Shirodkar is not, however, unwilling to categorically vouch for the statue's antiquity. "It certainly looks old but one can't say for sure. More tests will have to be done," he says. However, if the statue is an antique, then the law has been broken, because it has to be declared with the registrar of antiques.

Although Chowgule is now abroad, representatives of his firm insist that the statue was in fact purchased by Chowgule from a curio shop, Mercado de Arte, near the Taj Hotel Fort Aguada in May. A cheque of Rs 10,000 was paid for the statue and some other items including reportedly an altar piece. The shop has since closed down but owner Akhtar Essajee keen to establish his bona fides produced alleged sculptor Vaman Zo, before the *Navhind Times*.

Shirodkar wonders why Zo was not brought to meet him rather than taken to a newspaper. The 55-year-old sculptor told INDIA TODAY that he had carved the statue in 15 to 20 days back in 1982. His father, Kashminath Zo, also a sculptor, gave rough outlines to a block of wood in 1962 but shortly afterwards his eyesight failed and he became paralysed so he abandoned the work. The figure was left out in the open and completed by Zo only in 1982, when he sold it to Essajee for Rs 2,500. Many are sceptical of the low price quoted. According to *Herald* a piece of wood of this size would cost Rs 7,000. Others estimate the wood price as at least the equivalent of the sculpture's quoted price.

The cracks in the statue and the look of antiquity despite a fresh coat of varnish, according to Zo, is because the teak wood was kept out in the open for such a long time. Zo admits he learnt techniques about faking antiques during a two-year course in Portugal many years ago. But he insists that he himself utilised no ageing method for this particular statue.

"Indians like polished surfaces, foreigners like things to look old," he says. But though Zo is said to be an expert at giving new white ivory a dull brown colour to age it, he insists that he keeps away from faking antiquity after having got into trouble with the police two years ago.

Whether the St Francis statue is an antique or a clever fraud it is clear that the churches of Goa built during the Portuguese rule have become fertile ground for thieves and for connoisseurs of antiques. The ivory crosses, massive silver candlesticks, gold and silver crowns and batons have always been a temptation but since the mid-'60s there has been growing awareness of their value.

Percivial Noronha, secretary of the Goa Heritage Society, fears that "more than 40 per cent of our altar images have already left Goa either being sold or stolen." Said a senior priest at the Bishops Palace: "Some of the statues in old churches may have been sold without consulting us because of a mistaken belief that they were of little value. But, there was no malicious motive." Since the parish churches are so decentralised the Bishops Palace has little direct control and many valuable artefacts have been sold for a song. In 1973 the vicar of the church of St Matias in Tiswadi sold three chandeliers without the knowledge of the church committees. In 1965 the church of Batalhao in Margoa was pulled down and its rich tabernacles, altars and chandeliers sold for a pittance. The church of Siridao was another historic church whose objects of art were sold off as items of no commercial value. Its famous bell which exhibited the coat of arms of the house of Antonio Matias Gomes was sold for Rs 180. It was smuggled out of the country by two leading citizens and is now in Sweden.

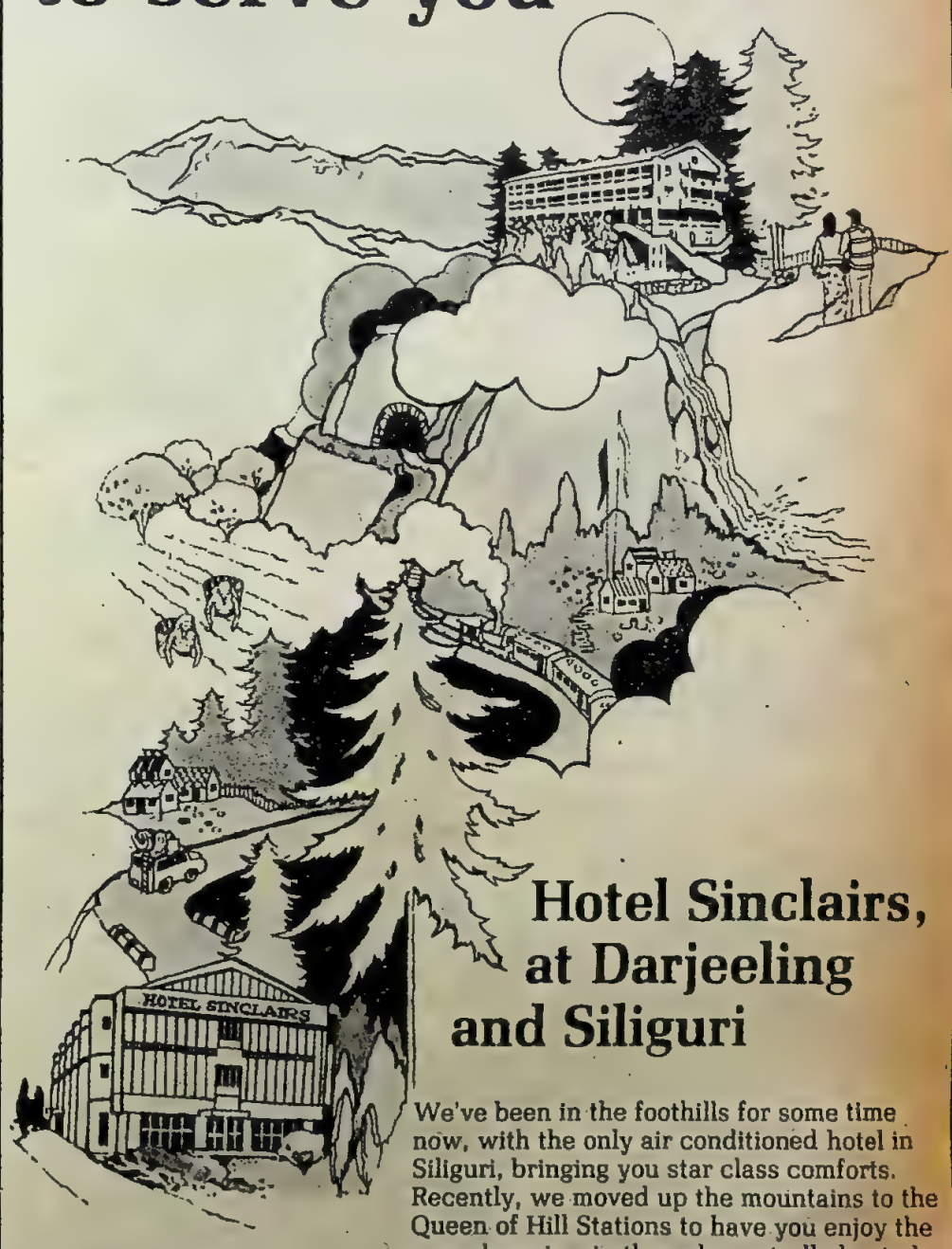
In the mid-'60s an ecclesiastical order was passed that the main altar be placed in the middle of the cross lane in the church. This acted as catalyst for the removal of the images from the traditional altars attached to the walls. A large number of thefts occur in the churches which are away from the rest of the village, particularly since no proper inventories are maintained. Just last month there was a theft in the church in Chinchinim. Scores of stolen images have gone to Europe and America and even as far away as Mexico. Mexican art critic, Beatrice Paintado, who visited Goa in 1982 said she had found Goan images in antique shops in her country.

With Goa fast become an antique smugglers' paradise, hullabaloo over the Chowgule statue is hardly unjustified.

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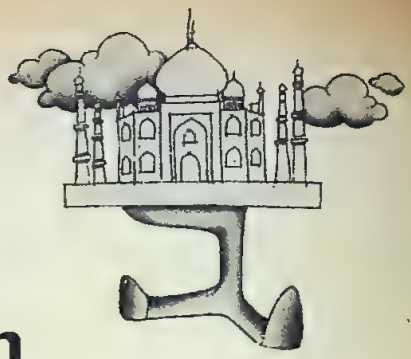
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TAMIL NADU

Musical Messages

CHILDREN the world over sing nursery rhymes. They make learning a lot easier. But the songs that some Tamil Nadu children are singing these days have nothing to do with black sheep or Jack and Jill or, indeed their equivalents in Tamil. Consider the following that a pre-school group was singing the other day:

My name is dustbin
My belly is very big...and I am hungry
You eat the fruit—but
Please feed me the skin
Rich and nourishing vegetables you may eat
But what I need is the peel and the waste
Please...please...please feed me!

Songs about dustbins? And nature, history, geography, personal hygiene, civic manners, the environment—even simple maths? The dustbin song is no exception, it is part of a new experiment in education that is beginning to make an impact on a small scale in Tamil Nadu. One bit of evidence: in most of the 130 pre-primary schools in the state where the experiment 'Education Through Music' is being tried, dustbins are used and the school campuses are remarkably clean.

The children are responding through out not just to dustbins—but to different aspects of life around them, to ideas complicated and simple that are being communicated to them. Some 200 rhymes have been thought out and 36 are already on mass produced tapes and in circulation in the schools covered by the experiment.

Says Rajeswari Viswanathan of the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and a pioneer of the experiment: "We have found that the child absorbs much more through music than the usual class-room formula." The idea came to her at a community singing programme at a private school where the students performed the work of M.B.Srinivasan, an authority on choral music and community singing and a film music director. She was impressed by the rapport between students and teachers during the sessions—and the idea was born.

It was Srinivasan who solved the problem of training a large number of teachers and Viswanathan was able to convince both the state Government and UNICEF to help, the former to sponsor the programme and the latter to finance the cost of training. The first workshop in 1981 had 40 teachers and 13 have been held since. Says Srinivasan: "I found the diction, intonation and pronunciation deplorable. Now I know why most children today speak such bad Tamil. My first job was to see that pronunciation and diction were perfected and when the songs were written, I made it a point to see that the child got to learn the language along with the subject."



RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Students singing in a Tamil Nadu school: innovative exercise

Fortunately, most of the teachers who came to the programme were excited by the prospect of teaching through music. They improved their own singing, their diction and overcoming their own inhibitions came to write songs. Starting with this, Srinivasan subtly introduced the basics of music into the programme, beginning with the notes of the octave and the *tal* or rhythm.

So it is hardly a surprise that teachers are enthusiastic with their initial results. Says Lalitha Dhanalakshmi of the Rani Meiyammai elementary school in Madras: "To keep the attention of a child has always been my difficulty, but music quickly became a binding factor and in a couple of days I was able to communicate with them through song." Adds Shanta Bai of the same school: "Maths or calculus are certainly no part of a child's world. I had always found it difficult to make a child understand—and not forcibly learn—why two and two made four. But when I started singing to them that father and mother made two and that a child in the family made it three, arithmetic suddenly meant something to them." Children asked about air now sing songs of fluttering leaves and moving clouds. And such examples are commonplace in the daily curriculum of the selected schools.

SCERT now plans to take this method of teaching to more schools this year, and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in Delhi, welcoming the project, has adopted a modified programme for elementary schools all over the country. But with a difference: NCERT's songs will be about national integration. Tamil Nadu's programme is, meanwhile, subject-oriented and some 300 teachers have already been trained. The high cost of training the thousands that would be required to take the programme to all schools in the state is an inhibiting factor. The Government added 30 Madurai and Ramnad schools to the experiment last month, and plans to do more. The scheme, currently covering children of between three and 10 years of age, is to be extended to higher classes. The scheme isn't all work, though. There is play, too. A child, carried on the wings of his fancy in one of the schools, was heard to sing: "My name is dustbin..." rounding off the jingle, tongue in cheek, "...My father's belly is also big and round!"

—RAGHAVENDRA RAO

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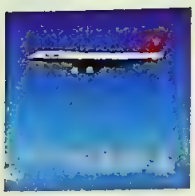
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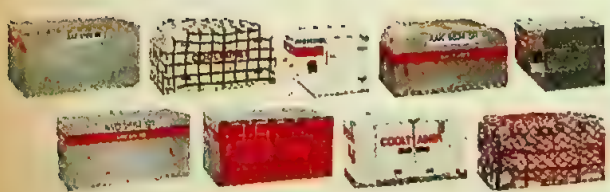
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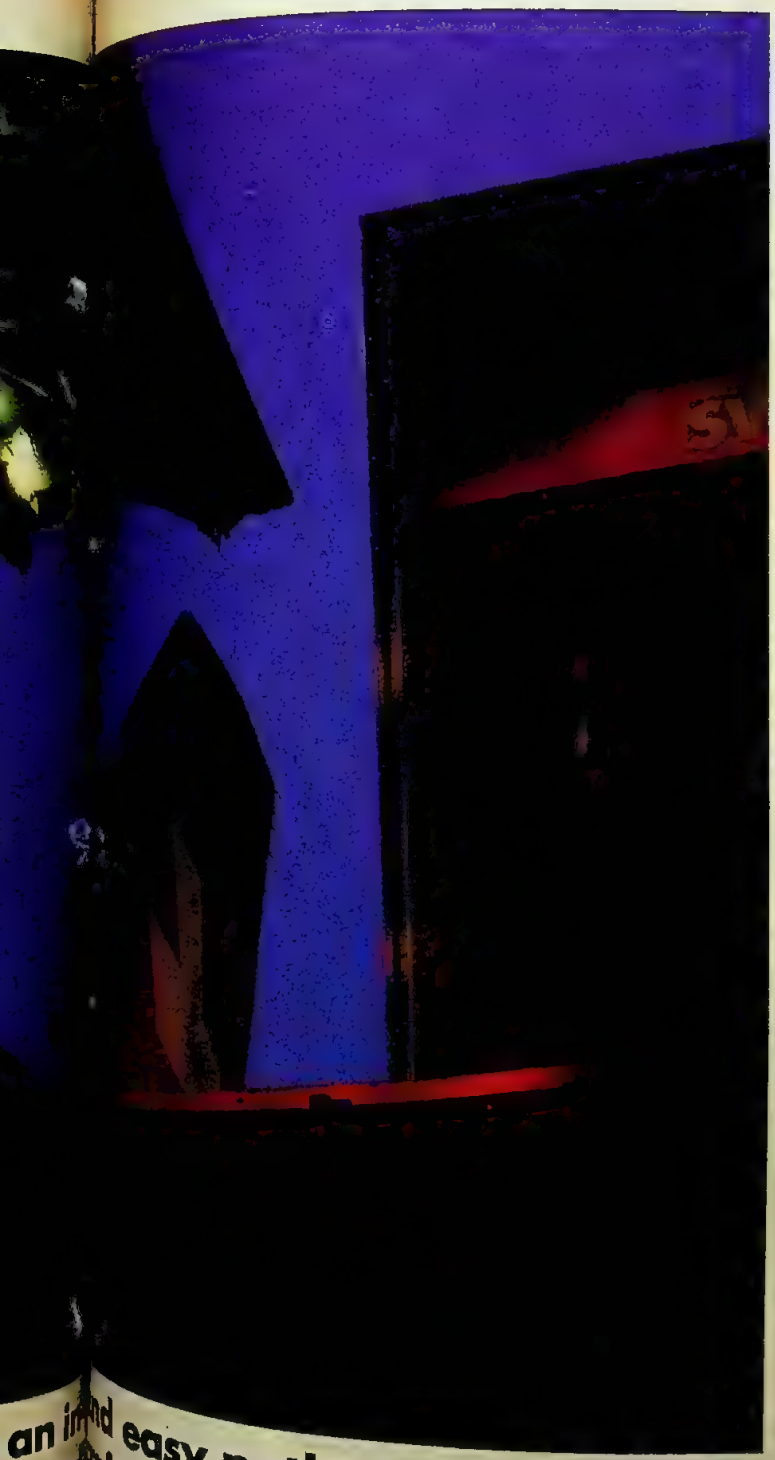
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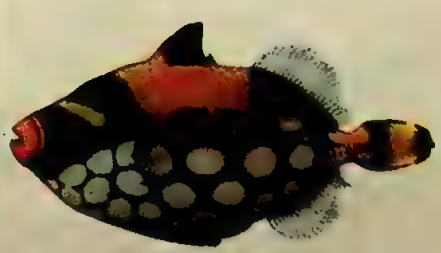
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Faded Rose

THE CLUB
INDIRA MAHINDRA
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THE RAJ, of course, being still the rage, is the chief reason this book is out. The author realises that and, in a recent interview, claims she wasn't quite sure of its worth even though it was written 12 years ago and tucked away as a half-forgotten manuscript. Other than that, there is now a certain chic associated with publishing Indian women writers, especially those who can convey how the imperial dream became a nightmare, and how it continues to haunt the lives of those who ruled and were ruled.

In the case of *The Club*, it's also worthwhile to note that it is published by Bodley Head, a company now owned by the group that also owns Chatto & Windus, publishers of Namita Gokhale's *Paro's Dream of Passion* (INDIA TODAY, February 15) and that the group recently acquired Virago Books, a very successful women's publishing house whose founder Carmen Calil is now firmly ensconced on Chatto's board of directors. From that position, the formidable Calil, now regarded as a force in British publishing, brings her bias to promoting new women authors. In the case of India, however, both the women writers selected for publishing this year can hardly stand up to the originality of women writers working in regional languages.

At least Gokhale's fiction, however, circumscribed its scope as a lift-off on the sexual shenanigans of upper class Indian society, provided an amusing, prankish diversion. It exuded a breathless, cock-eyed charm; it offered a hint of looking at things afresh. Mahindra's debut is, in comparison, a faded rose, especially as it fearfully treads on ground that all the angels have trodden hollow.

The book closest in genre to *The Club* is perhaps Paul Scott's *Staying On*. The setting, the people, the period are similar and both books run to approximately the same length; but the difference between the two is the difference between a polished, multi-faceted gem and a roughcast quarried from the mine.

In *Staying On*, the retired English colonel and his wife in small-town India perfectly encapsulated the hopelessness of it all: the alienation of old age exacerbated their lowered status as expatriates; the confusions of modern India only served to intensify the fear of ending up as aliens. And the twin alienations were so dexterously interwoven that their situation acquired a universal resonance.



Indira Mahindra

Exactly the opposite happens in *The Club*: already fragmented characters are further splintered by the action, so that in the end they all appear exotic basket cases, forever trapped in the penumbra of the Raj. They're like those insects embedded in bits of fossilised amber. That gives them a sickened, pointless glow as they wander around looking for or escaping from sexual encounters, all the while exhaling too much smoke and gulping too much whisky. And Mahindra's humourless elegantly ladylike prose makes them crawl.

The book is set in southern India, on a large stud-farm called Dunnestable in the town of Belpur. Dunnestable's inheritors being English—the sexually obscure, father-fixated, rather horsey Mabel and her good-looking, high-strung, randy stepsister Lucy—beside being women, the problems of gender only complicate race relations. Admittedly, this is the posh but certainly unpermissive society of the 1950s. What with a scheming raja, a horny general, a coffee planter beleaguered by rebellious offspring, one would think the precarious heterogeneity of the crowd and the grandeur of the locations, would have sated everyone's senses to avoid bridging the racial divide sexually. Not at all. As they move from clubhouse to stud-farm to coffee plantation, the chief preoccupation of the cast of Indian males is how to gate the two English women. And if one of them is eager to please, and the other isn't, well, she must be a lesbian.

After a point, when *The Club* begins to sound like scenes from a B movie on India made for western audiences—there is a snake-charmer, a shikar, even a seduction scene atop an elephant—you can hand it to Indira Mahindra for making a remarkably novel presumption about post-colonial relationships. Apparently the only way to come to grips with India is to fall into bed with an Indian. As the scene closes on Lucy planning to run away with the coffee planter's son and Mabel staying on to pursue an Indian girl—both highly implausible solutions in the diffident, nervous atmosphere of the 1950s—it is easier to conclude that *The Club* is about two batty English women who stayed on, and became battier as they went along.

—SUNIL SETHI

EXTRACT

She felt his arm behind her; what was he up to? He brought his face near hers and said, 'You're beautiful. You've stunned me with your beauty. Couldn't take my eyes off you when I met you.'

'Don't be stupid, General.'

'Stupid, because I've fallen madly in love with you.' His arms imprisoned her.

Good God, what was this? Was he mad? He must have paid the mahout, who was sitting like a carved statue. What the hell should she do? Well, why not?' she said to herself. Let's find out what Lucy does after. I may like it for all I know. And this fool can easily be kicked off later.

But she sat inert, with no responses. The General took her face and turned it up. 'Why are you so frigid? Don't act like a virgin, you can't fool me.'

His lips came down on hers, his stubby chin sandpapered her skin. Her intestines stiffened and shot up into her gullet; she held the bile down.

The General's huge hand went down her neck. He said hoarsely, 'Darling, let me see them, let me work on them, then you'll be with me. I've never seen a white woman's nipple. Are they as pink as....'

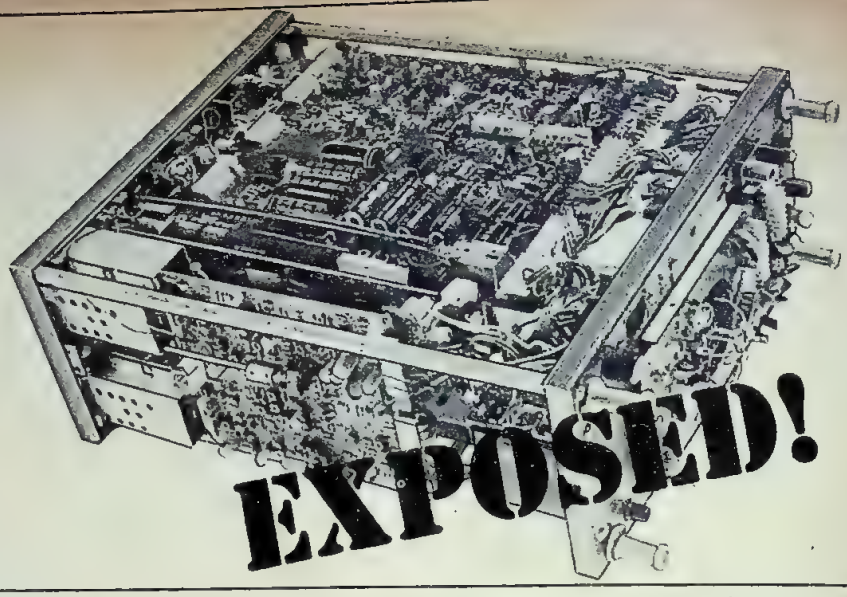
Mabel flung him off and hung limply over the arm of the chair. The bile would neither come up, nor go down. She kept repeating. 'You swine, how dare you? How dare you?'

He told the mahout to turn around and go back. He swallowed another brandy and said, 'Forget it. It was just in fun. I thought you'd be a good sport....'

'Shut up.'

'What's wrong? Why so prudish? Your men do it to our women. Why can't we....'

'Shut up, I said.'



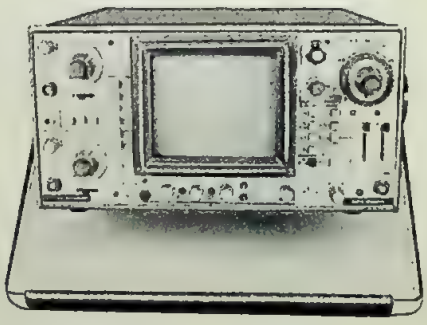
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OM PURI

An Actors' Actor

MUCH of what there is to be said about Om Puri is written on his face. It is a searing, haunting image that the camera has hypnotically captured, from the opening shots of *Aakrosh* through the harrowing, rain-drenched revelation in *Sadgati* to the final cathartic climax in *Ardh Satya*. It is an image that most viewers of the Hindi cinema in the last couple of years have carried around with them, a ready indicator of the pervading injustice and lethargy of the political system. And also a shining symbol of the changing values of the movies.

Of course, the reason why audiences place such trust in a face is, because, deep down, they know that its purpose will not be defeated nor its reality obliterated. It is there, forever watchful, groping at some greater truth; somewhere behind that scarred and pitted mask of pain there simmers rebellion, somewhere in that trapped, unflinching gaze there is knowledge of defiance.

In being able to suggest both the cause and effect of defeat and deprivation, pose the questions and reveal the answers, Puri's performances have had a uniquely liberating effect on audiences everywhere. In the brief span of three years they have shown him to be an actors' actor, the unqualified star of the alternative cinema, the Amitabh Bachchan of the truly dispossessed.

The accolades have come unabated: two National Awards for Best Actor (*Arohan and Ardh Satya*), a *Filmfare* Best Supporting Actor (*Aakrosh*) and, now, the Karlovy Vary for best actor in *Ardh Satya*. But they've left the man unshaken. He's pleased, yes, but the sudden attention and barrage of media interviews haven't hit the core. They won't. Om Puri's most abiding asset as a human being is not modesty (a quality almost always false in performers) but humility. It's a sense of being so deeply rooted in his social milieu and professional craft that the strain of sudden or spectacular achievement has passed him by. Speaking of the years of drift in Bombay, of doing bit parts in B movies, performing on stage or teaching acting courses, he says he never suffered from a feeling of getting nowhere. "I never felt let down or bitter because I never lost perspective on my life. Relax, I used to tell myself at especially difficult moments, what would you be doing if you weren't here? You would have ended up being a clerk somewhere. There was no terrible anticlimax in my life because I built no castles in the air. It made everything flow easy and even."

The actor is sitting in his hotel room, quietly reflective and lucidly matter of fact, as he talks about his life and work. His appearance is a relief after the unrelieved intensity and gloom of his performances: he's a small, neat man, his five-foot-nine frame dictated by an economy of style, a precision of movement. The marks on his face (effects of a smallpox attack so far back in his childhood he can't even remember where it happened), have been exaggerated on screen by lighting and shadows. He has an open, pleasant countenance; and when he speaks, his lovely, metallic-toned voice never hits the high-pitched exclamations that accompany the I-am-the-best hype of interviews with established performers these days. At 34, he's the sort of person who is unsurprised by success but would be equally unsurprised at any lack of it.

Although he personally never remembers his looks being held against him, Govind Nihalani, the director credited for discovering him in *Aakrosh* and refusing to make *Ardh Satya* without him, says that it was a struggle to persuade the producers of *Ardh Satya* to take him. "They just thought audiences wouldn't be able to take that face for too long," says Nihalani, who admits that the "visual force" of that face never left him since he first encountered Puri during dubbing sessions for *Junoon* in the late 1970s. But there are examples of prejudice, the most deplorable being that of the woman member of the *Filmfare* jury who reportedly vetoed his Best Actor nomination for *Aakrosh*, saying: "How can you? He's so ugly."

Today actress Smita Patil, his co-performer in *Ardh Satya*, *Sadgati* and *Mandi*, says: "An acceptance of Om has to do with a changed perception of the new cinema. The face of the chocolate box hero is disappearing fast. Amitabh Bachchan's advent dealt it a body blow. And Om Puri's success has wiped out the image completely." And film critic Ar... Malik who was at Karlovy Vary when ... received the award reports that, wh... questioned about his looks, most wom... at the press conference protested, say... that they found him sexy and strong... appealing in a macho way.

Puri himself is mildly amused abo... the debate surrounding his image in ... detached sort of way, his own though... concentrated mainly on the realm of ... work. "Money," he says briefly, "I ne... some money, some slight sense of sec... ity," when asked about the two comme... cial films, *Pathar* and *Saanjhi*, he has ... finished and the couple of others he ... on hand. "After years of scr... through life, I need a home. And mon... buys you the freedom of choice: I cou... take off a couple of months a year to act ... plays, to go away on a long journey, ... maybe just read. Even so, commercial ... films constitute no more than 30 per cent ... of my work. They never will." He's just ... finished a small role in Nihalani's newly-... completed film *Party* and is signed up as ... one of the main leads in his next called ... *Aghat*; together with Naseeruddin Shah ... and Shabana Azmi he forms the triumvi... rate that has been booked for Mrina... Sen's primeval odyssey set in the desert to ... be shot later this year; and presently he is ... playing a corrupt politician in Ramesh ...



RAGHU RAI

Puri: "I built no castles in the air"

Sharma's exposé of the perils of investigative journalism in a film called *New Delhi Times* that also stars Shashi Kapoor and Sharmila Tagore.

THE paramount need for basic financial security is understandable in a man who has lived on his wits for most of his working life. Born the youngest of eight children (of whom only two survived) to a mother who died in his adolescence and a father who, quitting the army long before, had taken a job as a railway clerk, Puri was dumped with relatives in Sanaur village, 5 km outside Patiala. Moving through the village school to Khalsa College in Patiala, he came in contact with Harpal and Nina Tiwana, both graduates of the National School of Drama (NSD) in Delhi. Till then, Puri was keen to join the army; his early years betrayed on relish for films. "I had seen a few Hindi films like *Jagte Raho* and *Aakhri Khat*, and they vaguely registered as something different."

At Patiala he joined the Kala Manch started by the Tiwanas, and soon took up a full-time job with the group. For a sum of Rs 200 a month, he undertook everything "from writing publicity boards to washing the green-room" besides acting most week-ends. Though his mentors advised him against it, Puri applied to join the NSD, then headed by the celebrated Alkazi, and in 1970 travelled to Delhi for the first time to take his test. He rehearsed the prescribed dramatic passages well, and two months later was told he'd been selected. He was awarded a monthly stipend of Rs 200, all but Rs 20 of which went to board and lodging. But lack of funds was the least of the intimidations. "It was my first experience of a big city," he says, "I spoke very little English. I couldn't understand what was going on in class. On top of this was the awe associated with Alkazi, the sort of man who sent students trembling if they encountered him in the toilet or the stairs. I just withdrew into myself. The first six months passed in a daze."

But then he began to crawl out of this shell, became close to Naseeruddin Shah, a class-mate, and was even drawn to Alkazi. "There's no question in my mind that my greatest debt as an actor is to him." The NSD led to the Film Institute in Pune, but only after a precarious year of freelancing. He was disturbed by the subservience of the institute to the Bombay film industry—"it was generally a very sick scene"—but as a result had absolutely no illusions when he finally hit Bombay in 1976. "As I expected a welcome of no kind whatsoever, I first began to look for a regular job to support myself." Luckily he found one as a teacher in an acting school. In his spare time, he set about organising a theatre group which he christened "Majma".

His first venture was to direct a political play called *Dharamsala*, financed by friends. "We survived on the choice of our plays and the sincerity of our performance. There was no emphasis on production values, only on script and performance. We used to rehearse mainly on the beach and, once, when it began raining, we carried on in a restaurant by ordering fresh rounds of tea." Within six months, "Majma" had established itself as an important link in fringe theatre.

His first film role came via Girish Karnad (who had been director of the Film Institute when he was a student there) who offered him a part in his Kannada film *Godhuli*. Then came Mani Kaul's *Ghasiram Kotwal*, funded by a 16-member cooperative formed on a basis of a bank loan. But it was not till Nihalani cast him in *Aakrosh*, that he was noticeable. "And frankly", he says today, "my performance in that film was made on the editing table. I had little to do with it."

With the combined commercial and artistic success of *Ardh Satya* he realised how noticeable he had become. "Surprised? No, let's say I was a little taken aback at how the system turns on you. Every three days I was listening to two new scripts. Admittedly, I didn't pick up more that 10 per cent of the work available but it was how attitudes changed, everybody's attitude from a top director to a lightboy."

Still, he feels that the "sudden pampering" is a sign of audiences being too easily pleased. "It's too convenient to be stuck in the fashionable Om-Smita-Shabana-Naseer syndrome. The only way we can break out is with new competition, discovery of untapped talent. And of course by making new types of films. We cannot afford to lose the momentum that has gradually been built up."

Om Puri's remarkable leap forward testifies to the momentum. His odds-on success signifies that there's fight left in him. For a man who has stuck to his guns right through, from his modest beginnings to the long, grinding years of impecunity, his grit lies in changing people's views of him rather than changing himself to their acceptable view. Just as well he didn't join the army. But to him, the difference isn't much. "Believe me," he says, "acting requires all the discipline, the stamina and the patience of being a good soldier. The battles are just as bad."

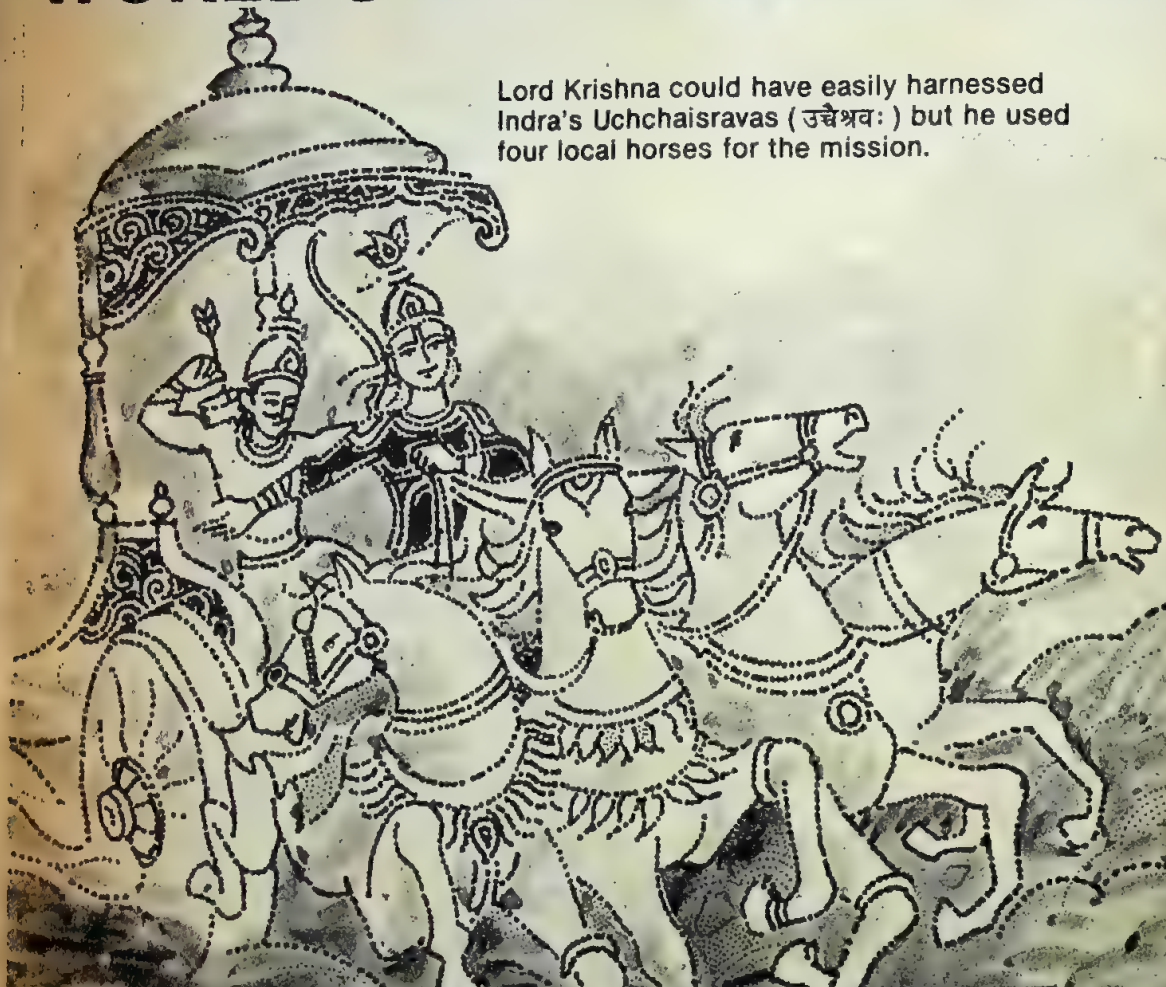
—SUNIL SETHI

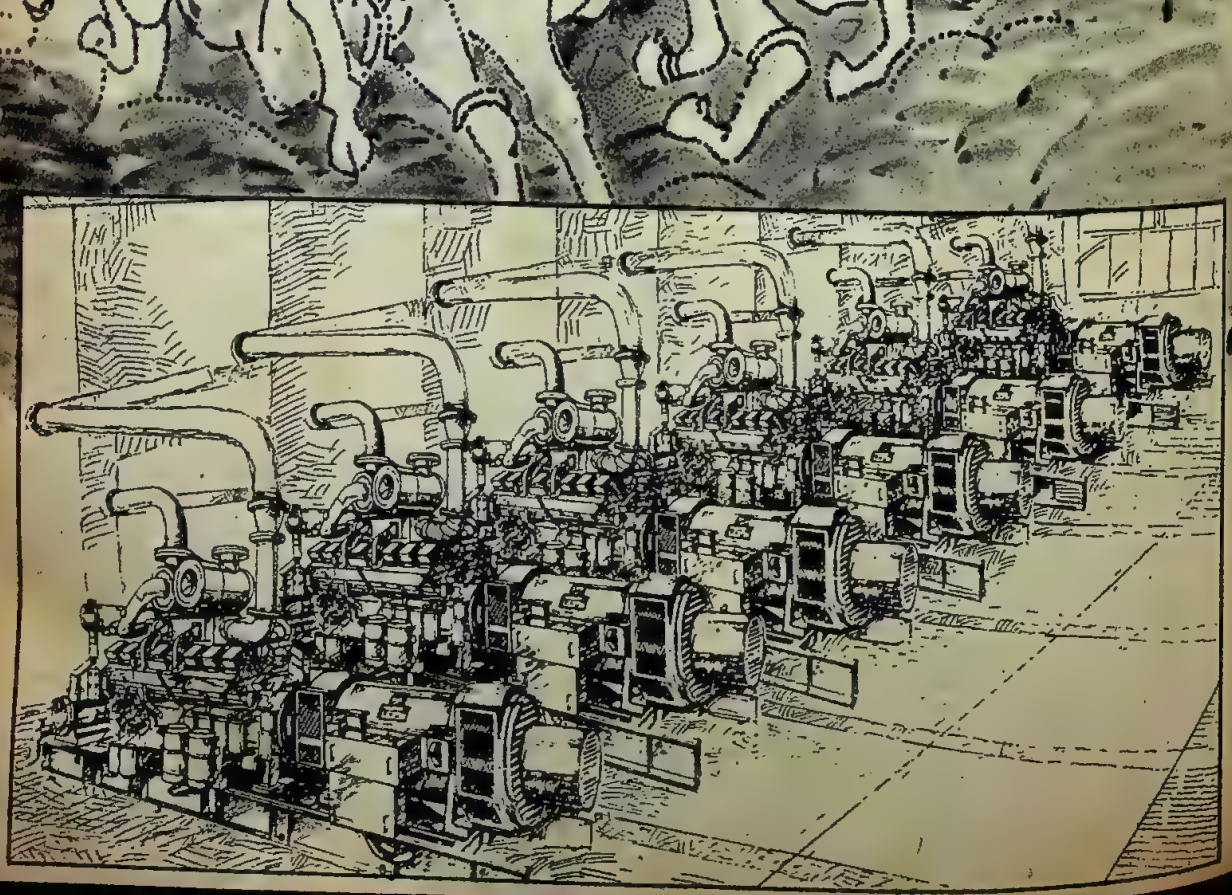


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DRUGS

The Heroin Threat

IT appears to have happened sooner than later. With India becoming a major transit centre for heroin trafficking (INDIA TODAY, May 15, 1981) narcotics experts were expecting some of that deadly white powder to find its way into the local market and thence into the bloodstreams of Indians. Their worst fears were confirmed recently when psychiatrists in several metropolitan cities reported an alarming rise in the number of heroin addicts from among patients coming for treatment.

In New Delhi last fortnight a 35-year-old autorickshaw-driver was brought to the de-addiction clinic at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) with severe withdrawal symptoms of heroin addiction. He was in extreme pain and it looked as though his entire body was weeping. He had a running nose, saliva dribbled from his mouth, tears poured from his eyes and he was sweating profusely. Doctors put him on a heavy dose of tranquillisers and brought him back to normal but they are sceptical about curing him. He had come for the same problem six months ago but did not heed their advice to give up heroin.

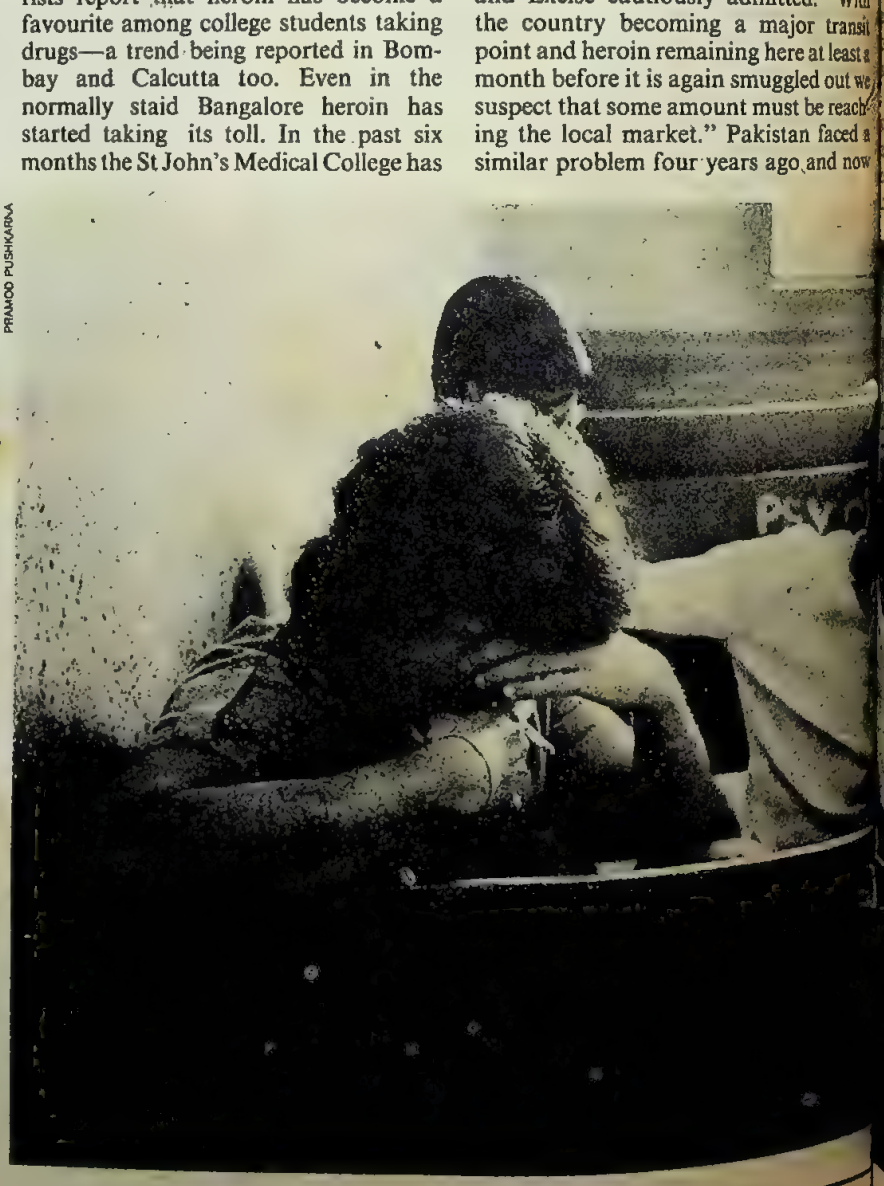
He is not the only victim. In the past two years the AIIMS has already treated 110 patients, all of them Indian. Initially the addicts were mainly foreigners but since 1982 the trickle of Indian victims has grown into a steady stream and the clinic now treats an average of two patients a week. While in 1983 they treated 41 patients, they have already treated as many in six months of this year. The heroin addiction, low though it may be, is on the rise. Doctors estimate that for every patient that comes for treatment there are 20 others who do not, which leads Davindar Mohan, the bespectacled assistant professor of psychiatry at AIIMS and a WHO consultant to warn: "The heroin plague is here and if we don't watch out it's going to knock the hell out of our health programme in the next few years."

The threat is real. Other metropolitan cities have already started reporting the problem. In Calcutta, a 21-year-old steward of a five-star hotel took to heroin a year ago and continued the 'trip' when he was transferred to Delhi. When he started slipping up at work and ignored warnings to give up the drug he was sacked from his job. In Madras psychiatrists report that heroin has become a favourite among college students taking drugs—a trend being reported in Bombay and Calcutta too. Even in the normally staid Bangalore heroin has started taking its toll. In the past six months the St John's Medical College has already treated 11 Indian patients. Recently doctors at St John's treated a 21-year-old engineering student who revealed that after he ran out of money he sold his tape-recorder and wrist-watch to buy the drug. In fact heroin addiction among Indians, which was negligible only two years ago, has now moved up to second spot among drugs abused—next only to cannabis.

The rise in heroin addiction among Indians seems to tally with the flow of the drug in the country. In 1981 only 9 kg of heroin was seized. Last year the amount went upto as much as 129 kg. Most of the heroin is smuggled into India from Afghanistan or the Pakistan border. Then it finds its way to Delhi or Bombay, and drug peddlers export it to Europe and the US. In Delhi's imposing North Block an official of the Central Board of Customs and Excise cautiously admitted: "With the country becoming a major transit point and heroin remaining here at least a month before it is again smuggled out we suspect that some amount must be reaching the local market." Pakistan faced a similar problem four years ago and now

Heroin addiction among Indians, which was negligible two years ago, has now moved up to second spot among drugs abused next only to cannabis.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Patients await medical attention at a Delhi hospital: misguided trip

number of drug addicts has reported-
ovelled to around 1.5 lakh, most of
using opium derivatives such as
ne and heroin.

S INDIA heroin addiction was never
a threat because of its prohibitive
rice: a gram of pure heroin costs
ed Rs 250. But recently a cruder
m of heroin called "brown sugar" has
ded the local markets and is priced at
Rs 40 a gram. With only half a gram
ed to induce a feeling of euphoria or
ai" heroin is now within the reach of
dian middle and lower classes who
to spend only as much as they do on
e of beer. It is these people and not
long-haired hippies of yester-years
are the new victims. Today's heroin
ers are ordinary people—hotel man-
, school and college students, en-
rs, architects, autorickshaw drivers
businessmen—almost all are males.
What is significant is that most of the
took to heroin even before they
other drugs, shattering the belief
one needs to progress up the drug
to try heroin. They took it initially
"for the heck of it", and then became regulars. Said a Delhi businessman: "Since others were taking it I tried it out. The first time I vomited but the next time I had this heavenly feeling. I was happy with the world. But as soon as I stopped taking heroin I felt miserable and had to take it over and over again. I just can't stay away from it." As a result of heroin's strong addictive properties chances of curing victims is extremely low—hardly 20 per cent who come for treatment stay away from the drug after that. Psychiatrists are worried not only about the patient's health but they fear that crimes may go up too. Most of the addicts run out of money and begin to sell their household items or borrow money and if that fails they start stealing it.



The Government has so far been reacting sluggishly to the heroin threat. Right now it is the responsibility of the Union Finance Ministry to keep watch on the rise in drug addiction by using information supplied by the Narcotics Commissioner of India. The Finance Ministry has already been apprised of the problem and has asked the social welfare and health ministries to look into it. But these three ministries rarely work in co-ordination and the result is that the files on addiction have been shunted from one ministry to the next with no firm action forthcoming. In fact, as far back as 1977 a special committee set up by the Union Government to look into drug abuse recommended that a national board on drug abuse control be formed under the Union Health Ministry to co-ordinate steps taken to prevent drug addiction. But although the Government has approved of this proposal, the board has so far not been constituted.

To prevent the heroin plague from sweeping through the country as it has done in Pakistan, narcotics experts say that not only must measures be taken to reduce heroin trafficking but the Government must set up de-addiction centres in all affected cities to treat patients. These clinics must also act as public education centres and publicise heroin's ill-effects in their areas of operation. Otherwise, as Ravi Kapur, a former head of the department of psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore, warns: "If we don't do anything about it now we are going to have an epidemic on our hands soon." But the first priority is to admit the problem exists and there is no time to be lost. Once addiction strikes roots it has its own, unstoppable, deadly momentum.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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RAGHU RAI

Laxman: the uncommon man

■ For a million sleepy people, there's nothing quite like **R.K. Laxman** with an early morning cuppa—and for 36 years, India's leading cartoonist has been dipping here, there and everywhere to flavour political gloom with his own special brand of humour. Last fortnight, the man who has given the country so many smiles was rewarded with a big one himself when he was awarded the 1984 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism and Creative Arts. Said a shy Laxman: "I thought someone was pulling my leg." Now that's a change.

■ Is **Zeenat Aman** getting married or is she not? Last fortnight, the air was rife with rumours that Pakistan's dashing cricket hero **Imran Khan** had popped the question to his lady love and his lady love had gushed, "I will". But instead of a wedding came a lull. When Khan and Aman decided on a lips sealed response, their mothers decided to move in. Imran's mama issued a statement that her son had not proposed to Zeenie, and Mrs Heinz, the lady's mother, insisted that her baby was "not, repeat not, getting married to anyone for some time to come". An abrupt end of an affair, there.

■ Some marriages are made in heaven, but this one was made right next door. Last week, **Sandeep Patil**, India's hard hitting batsman gazed down his balcony and invited **Dipika Divekar**, girl next door, to come and his wife. She is 19, a final commerce student, has nose in her books and interest in sports. Which Patil just fine. A self-confe male chauvinist, he did admit that he was looking a homely wife who would him "some solid understanding" and a nice, hot cup of when he came home.

Imran Khan (left) and Zeenat Aman: firm denials



■ A slave girl like Kamla would fetch no more than a couple of hundred rupees in the flesh trade of which she is a victim, but put her in a film and the stakes zoom much higher—Rs 5 lakh in this case. Last month, the *Indian Express* and its angry young correspondent **Ashwini Sarin** filed a suit against playwright **Vijay Tendulkar** and film director **Jagmohan Mundhra** for the audacity with which they made a film, using all of Sarin's muck-raking details—and without as much as a by your leave. Mundhra, however, is unfazed. "A newspaper report narrating purely factual happenings," his affidavit argues, "can have no copyright subsisting in it." Facts are facts, of course: besides, all this publicity can do Mundhra's film no great harm.



A scene from Mundhra's film *Kamla*: question of copyright





Joseph: striking the right no

■ Singer-turned politici **P.J. Joseph**—has turned s ger again. "This beaut dusk is silent dear," warb Kerala's 39-year-old reven minister as he recorded first song as playback sing for the film *Sabarimala D sanam* in Trivandrum rec ly. Becoming now the ever minister to record a so he modestly admitted, "Sin ing is in my blood", bef rushing off to Adoor to the political threat from ar rival K.M. Mani—and wh things are not going quite smoothly.

Sandeep and Dipika: a homely match



DURGA PRASAD: Society

2092

2091

2090

2089

IN FOC

Glimm

The deci
the Golden
of hope sin
much tha
troubled st
semblance

COVER S

"Indira

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IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT



Glimmer of Hope

The decision to finally pull the army out of the Golden Temple provided the first glimmer of hope since Operation Bluestar. But there is much that needs to be done before the troubled state of Punjab can return to even a semblance of normalcy.

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A Troubled Mood

On election-eve and after the Andhra Pradesh debacle, the Congress(I) is troubled. The disaffection is more than just pre-election jostling. Plus an Opinion Poll on how the Andhra episode has affected the party's prospects in the upcoming general election.

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A Growing Threat

Startling facts about the growth of cancerous diseases in India were revealed at a recent seminar in New Delhi. Health officials have come to the conclusion that cancer is one of the top three killers of adults all over the country.

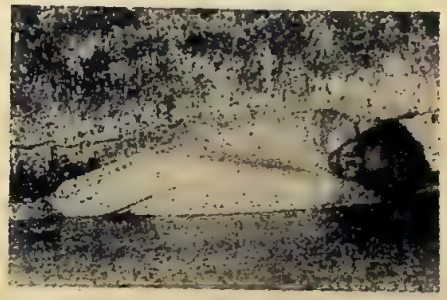
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"Indira is a Liar"

Charan Singh, 82, leader of the Lok Dal wields tremendous power over his sprawling constituency. Last fortnight the untiring Singh was out on his campaign trail. A candid interview with the vetern opposition leader about his political views.

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Criminal Callousness

Inside the grim and dreary walls of Ahmedabad's Remand Home for children is a near horror story of criminal neglect and mistreatment by callous officials. With voices throttled, there seems to be no end in sight to the nightmare of the children.

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The Capital Showpiece

Delhi's National Museum, after years of neglect and decay, is gradually being reverted to its original splendour, thanks to its enterprising new Director Dr J. P. Sihare. The new look was symbolised by an exhibition of 45 masterpieces of ancient Indian sculpture.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

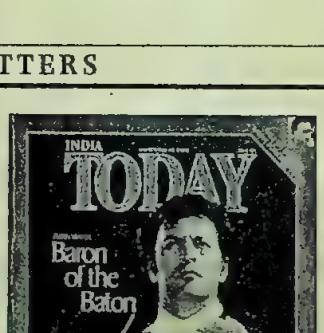
THE institution of awards for excellence in journalism has been a new trend in this country. And INDIA TODAY *has claimed its share of the harvest. Last month, Bhopal Correspondent* SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *took home the first prize in the Statesman's awards for rural reporting.*

Khandekar's award-winning entries exposed the hypocrisy in programmes said to benefit the poor in Madhya Pradesh. His coverage of this has been consistent. Ever since he moved to Bhopal in 1982, he has made extensive trips into the countryside to look at the reality behind tall claims of development. In the issue of April 15, 1983, Khandekar showed the state Government's claims on the release and rehabilitation of bonded labour to be a complete lie. Two months later, he examined the implementation of the much trumpeted Minimum Wages Act in the countryside and found it to be a paper law. Worse, he came up with cases of state ministers and Congress(I) leaders paying their own farm labourers far less than stipulated in the Act. And, in the October 31 issue last year, Khandekar wrote about the effects on villagers in a single tehsil who for 34 years had been waiting for a dam to be built that will submerge their homes and fields. Apart from these, his writing has been more about rural or off-beat subjects rather than the run-of-the-mill political stories that many reporters tend to concentrate on.


Khandekar

Khandekar's is an unusual story in that starting out as a sub-editor at INDIA TODAY, *he graduated to reporting and sought an assignment in a state capital where he could grow and develop his journalism. Most reporters in the states are on the look out for a metropolitan assignment —with Delhi the most sought after as the national capital—but Khandekar, now 28, recognised that he would learn faster and make his mark sooner if worked in the less crowded field of a small town in the middle of a large, under-reported state. The Statesman award has proved the correctness of his decision.*

LETTERS



SOUND OF MUSIC

I read your cover story on Zubin Mehta ("Baron of the Baton", September 30) with great interest. It was excellently done and the cover photograph was of a very high quality. The photograph like the rest of the story brings out the mood, rhythm and the characteristic quality of the 'Baron'.

New Delhi — SANDEEP TIWARI

■ Your article on Zubin Mehta suffers from two major weaknesses: it has an overplus of hyperbole and saccharine; it does not penetrate to the secret of Mehta's success. He is by no means the world's greatest conductor, as you put it. The image he projects is one of machismo. He has no fire from heaven like Karajan.

Bombay — ARUN SONALKAR

■ Zubin Mehta I feel has been glorified to a regrettable height. There was no necessity to postpone the regular national telecast on the Doordarshan to accommodate the dying minutes of his concert. A video recording could have been telecast later for the enthusiasts. Doordarshan succumbed to the 'phoren' euphoria.

New Delhi — K.N. JOSS

■ If only our political maestro wielded the 'baton' as gracefully as Zubin!

Coorg — C.P. BELLIAPPA

PERPETUAL POSTPONEMENT

This refers to your editorial comment "Committee Craze" (September 30). Your view of the committee as a group which keeps minutes but squanders hours has become a universal view, judging from the nature of its working. The comming

investigates or studies a particular problem, submits its report or recommendations after taking its own sweet time. By the time the report sees the light of the day the people might have forgotten the main issues as public memory is proverbially short. The report is doomed as follow-up measures are hardly noticeable, for they are sometimes never taken.

SHEKHAR ODHEKAR
Kochi

■ The editorial comment aptly brings to light the effective ways of the Government to postpone difficult and embarrassing issues. It reminds one of the comparison between a Thunder Box and a commission—"There is a sitting, a report, and then the matter drops."

S.K. MUSHRAN
Lucknow

NO EASY OPTION

The article on the Sri Lankan problem ("The Shadow Play", September 30) was an unbiased picture of the historical perspectives of the current ethnic conflict. No right thinking Sri Lankan would consider separation of the country as a solution to the ethnic crisis. But the inability of the "referendum government" to arrive at a political consensus and its failure to prevent indiscriminate killings of civilians has already created an emotional isolation of the linguistic groups.

Bahrain
P.T. JAYAWICKRAMARAJAH

MADDENING APATHY

I could hardly credit that people can be so uncaring and inhuman as those described in the article on the Ranchi mental asylum ("Escape from Insanity", September 30). The blame cannot be laid on the shoulders of the RMA Superintendent Durga Bhagat. The fault is that of a society that has mortgaged its eyes and ears and feels no stirring of compassion when the mentally ill are cast off as valueless.

Meerut
RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

A SORDID DRAMA

It was good that you highlighted the series of unconstitutional and sordid acts played by the Congress(I) in Andhra Pradesh ("Battle for Democracy", September 30) to subvert popular will. But the evil machinations have failed and the people have succeeded in restoring the ousted Rama Rao to his position of chief minister-ship. People will not forget. The next fight will be at the hustings—between dictators and democrats.

Bangalore
C.R.S. MURTHY

■ Now is the time for N.T. Rama Rao to realise what went wrong with his administration. If he wants to retain his popularity with the people, he should refrain from cheap public stunts and antics. He should learn to behave properly both with bureaucrats and his colleagues to have their confidence in him. He should remember that he is not acting in one of his films or playing God. If he fails to mend his ways his future may be in jeopardy.

Orissa
G. PURNA RAO

THE ULTIMATE ACTOR

I read the profile on Naseeruddin Shah ("Portrait of a Perfectionist", September 30) with great delight. There can be no doubt that Shah is the ultimate of Indian cinema. His eye for perfection and his wide ranging histrionic ability, combined with his deep sense of attachment is simply unparalleled. That he should receive the best actor's award in Venice is fitting recognition of his prodigious talent. Carry on Shah, we love you.

Bangalore
N.J. RAVI CHANDER

AN ABORTIVE COUP

The cover story ("Andhra Pradesh: Democracy Betrayed", September 15) was bold. Democracy in the country has not merely been betrayed but butchered. It has portrayed the nation in a very bad light and has brought India tremendous disrepute in the international political scene.

Bombay
K.R. RAMACHANDRAN

■ In a country where governors do not even sneeze without the permission of the Centre, one cannot believe that Ram Lal acted on his own. If the Congress(I) can behave like this on the eve of the elections, one can well imagine what is in store for us if it returns to power. If democracy does not survive in the country, the press too will not. Everyone (except those who were involved) sided with the press in its campaign against the Bihar Press Bill. Now that the country is in distress, the press should join hands with the public to remove those dirty men who do not have the slightest regard or respect for democracy and the Constitution.

Lucknow
DHIRESH BAHADUR

■ The removal of N.T. Rama Rao from office has been described by many as a blatant violation of the basic principles of democracy, but actions of this nature have become so routine (Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, and now Andhra Pradesh, all in less than one year) that one tends to accept them as part of democracy (the Indian version, of course).

Kathmandu, Nepal
SANJAY UPADHYA

■ I do not understand the furore over NTR's ouster. There is nothing undemocratic about the sacking of the chief minister. He asked for it by his total disrespect for his colleagues. If his party members decided to switch the leadership it is within their democratic right. Most of us are so blinded by anti-Indira mania that we cannot differentiate between idealism and idolatry.

United States
PRAFULLA V. DUNUNG

■ In the interview Bhaskara Rao claims that he is the founder of the Telugu Desam party and not N.T. Rama Rao. And he even says that Mrs Gandhi is a 'mataji' and not just a national leader but also an international leader. If he really means that he would never have formed the Telugu Desam and defeated the Congress(I) in Andhra Pradesh.

Bangalore
SHASHIKALA

■ It goes without saying that the *coup d'etat* has been intended to throw NTR in to the shade before the ensuing parliamentary poll. But the device has boomeranged throwing all the data of the Congress(I)'s political computer into a shambles; and much to the surprise of Mrs Gandhi and her clan it has created an opportune situation to facilitate opposition unity before the poll.

Pacode, Tamil Nadu
P. VIJAYA CHANDRAN

INFERIORITY COMPLEX

"The Dubai Drama" (September 15) once again proved that India does not have any clout abroad. We have to beg for things that should come to us naturally. Firstly, the IA plane was refused permission to land in Dubai for an hour which almost killed the passengers. Yet not a word of protest from anyone against this inhuman attitude of the Dubai authorities. Secondly, the hijackers could certainly have been sent to the US even after the release of passengers but for a firm refusal from the US authorities to take them. Thirdly, it took almost a week for the Dubai authorities to decide to return the hijackers to India. Yet, surprisingly the Indian Government has 'thanked' the Dubai authorities. Everybody in the country suffers from the disease of slavish mentality vis-a-vis foreigners, and anybody in the world can insult us with impunity.

Nagpur
DEEPAK DESHPANDE



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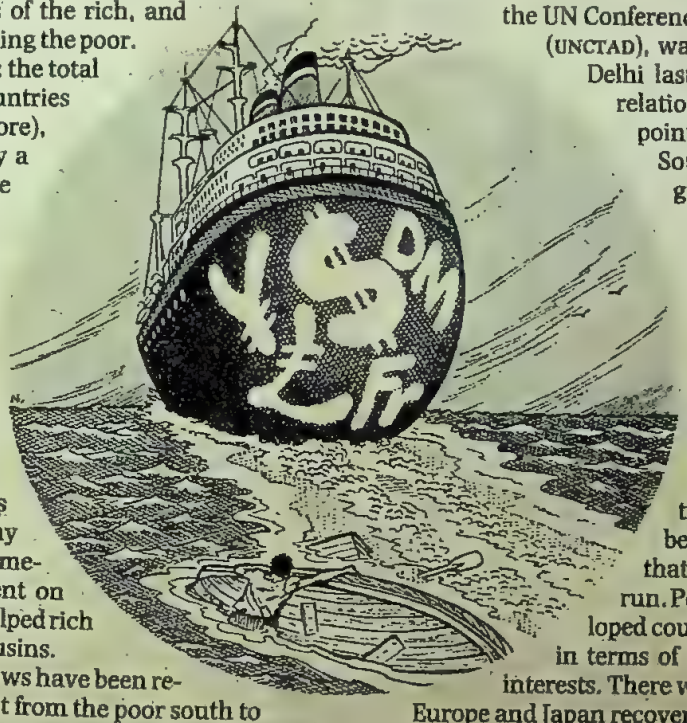
Thank you yesterday. Welcome tomorrow.

UCL-1348

Squeezing the Poor

THERE was bad news from Washington last month, and more seems likely to come. In a display of economic arrogance and selfish unconcern for the framework of global economic cooperation that has functioned, however imperfectly, for decades, the United States and its think-alikes used the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in late September to turn down all the major demands of the hard-pressed developing countries, and to prevent any action where it is needed: to change the negative attitudes of the rich, and their role in further impoverishing the poor.

Consider the startling facts: the total exports of all the developing countries fell by $2 billion (Rs 2,400 crore), while their imports crashed by a staggering $20 billion. These reflected, on the one hand, the closing of trade doors by the rich countries, and on the other, the inability of the poor countries, to pay for badly needed imports. Those developing countries which heeded the World Bank's persistent advice over the years to follow outward-looking, export-oriented policies may have a thing or two to say about this, and about the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which has helped rich countries but not their poor cousins.



At the same time, capital flows have been reversed, with money flowing out from the poor south to the rich north, instead of the other way round. This has been instigated primarily by the policies of the US Government, which have resulted in high interest rates in the US and a consequent magnet-like attracting of money from all over the world, which in turn has inflated the exchange value of the dollar. This has raised the value of Third World debt, while the high interest rates have raised the interest burden of this debt.

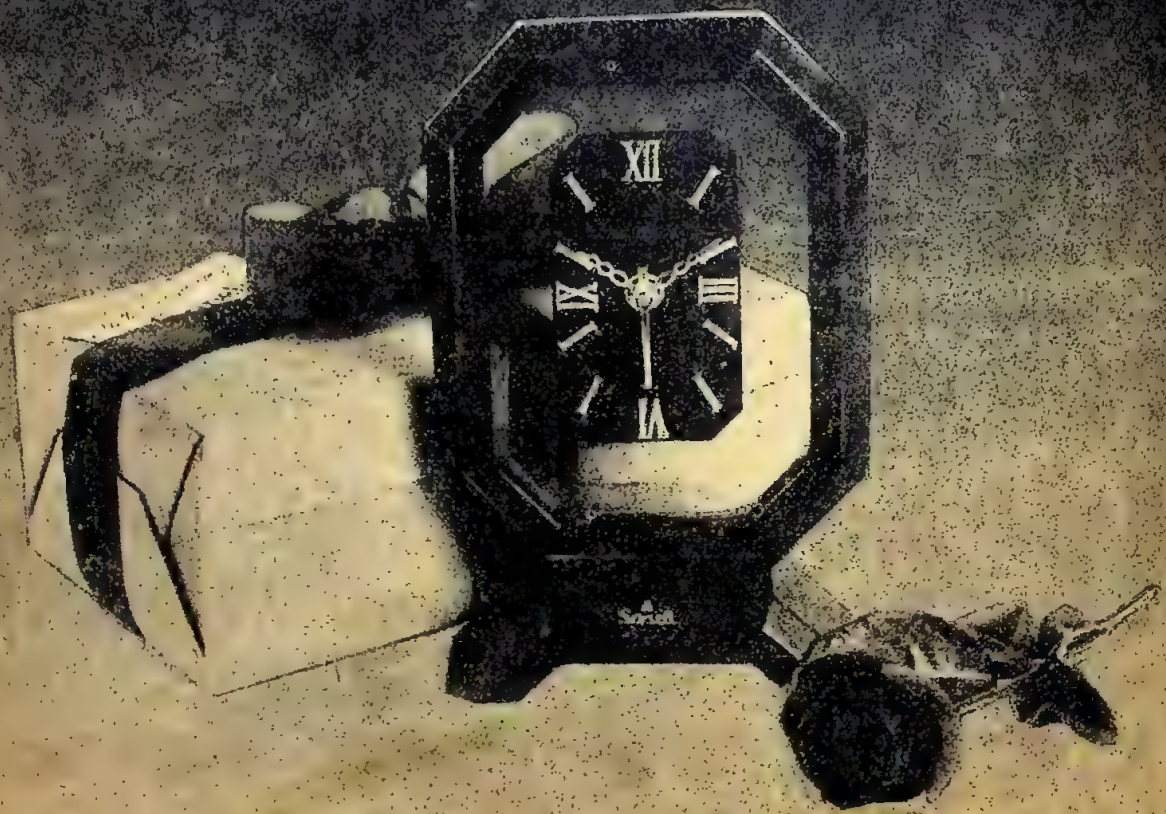
This would be a time, therefore, for international aid flows to increase. Instead, these flows have stagnated, if not declined. Loans by the International Development Association on ultra-soft terms have suffered a sharp fall, the average terms for aid have therefore hardened, and total aid has stagnated. In recent years, the US and other rich countries have been suggesting that aid should be supplemented, if not substituted, by private capital flow. But it was revealed last fortnight in Washington that even these will now stagnate. Meanwhile, the World Bank has been increasingly converted into a body that is used primarily to ensure the safety of private foreign investment in the Third World, or to force adjustments in the economic policies of the poor countries—a task once left to the IMF.

In this kind of climate, it should cause no surprise that the developing countries' demands in Washington got nowhere. Instead, their access to IMF funds has been reduced, their call for increasing international financial liquidity has been rejected, and the proposal for a global conference on money and finance reduced to a debate within the World Bank-IMF auspices, where the rich countries have both voting clout and veto power. And Raul Prebisch, the renowned economist who was the first secretary-general of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), was dead right when he said in Delhi last fortnight that North-South relations had reached their lowest point ever, and that the North-South dialogue was now a dialogue of the deaf.

The developing countries must ponder what they can do in this hostile environment. The solution of promoting South-South economic cooperation and trade has made some progress, but not really got off the ground. And a second recent trend, to encourage barter trade between countries, can be only a short-term aberration that cannot survive in the long run. Perhaps the attitude of the developed countries can only be understood in terms of their perception of long-term interests. There was a time when the US helped Europe and Japan recover from the effects of the Second World War; later, substantial skills and technologies were passed on to countries in South-east Asia and South America. In each case, the end result has been greater competition for the developed world from the newly emerging countries and both Europe and the US are now intent on preventing future Japans and South Koreas from emerging.

Combined with all this is a fundamental hostility to the politics of the South, and to the vision of global economic cooperation pursued by such agencies as UNCTAD and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (witness the sinking of the tentative agreement on a new law of the sea, three years ago). In place of this, there is the renewed romance with the economics of the market-place, which is touted as a panacea for all ills (but not for the very same developed countries that close their trade doors). What must be noted here is not the economic logic put forward, or the rhetoric of debate, or the negotiating stands. At heart, there is a fundamental hardening of attitudes. And unless this goes, the developing countries can do just two things: continue to drum home their points of view while doing everything possible at home to lift themselves up by their bootstraps.

A Gift in time...

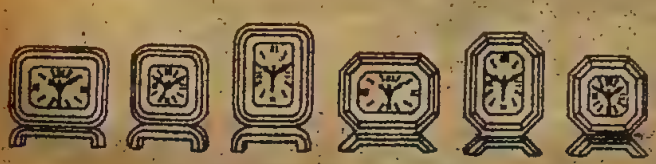


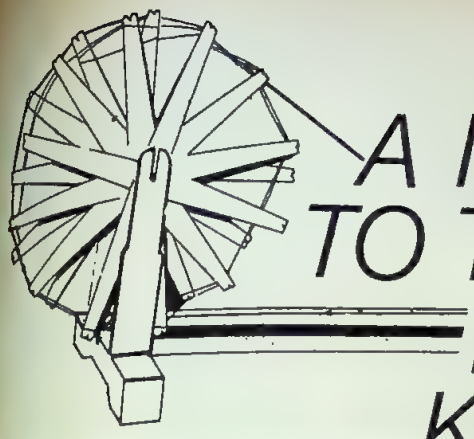
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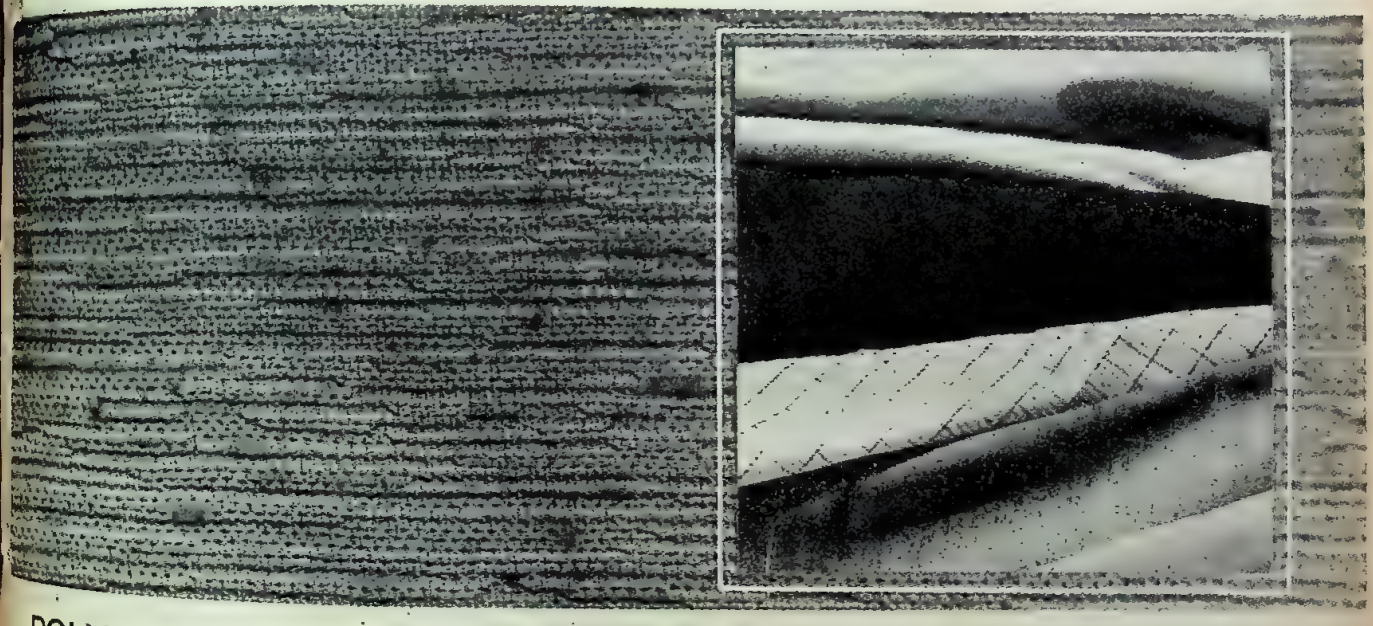
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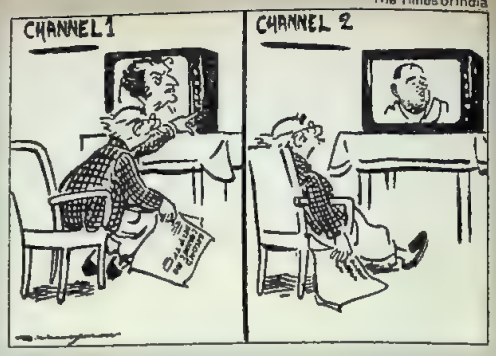
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The Times of India



• *A politician thinks of the next election, while a statesman thinks of the next generation.*
■ R. VENKATARAMAN quoted in *The Times of India*

• *She's (Mrs Gandhi) always taken an opportunistic line. I was like a son to her and today she's got me on 17 cases—murder, attempted murder, kidnapping and the works, and stealing her towel.*
■ AKBAR (DUMPY) AHMED in *Imprint*

• *The action of the governor in dismissing Mr Rama Rao and swearing in Bhaskara Rao in his place was in perfect conformity with democratic norms and precedents. The commitment of the Congress(I) to democracy is well-known.*
■ RAJIV GANDHI at a convention in *Trivandrum*

• *(The army is) a bogey man with a grim face. If I show this grim face too often, people get used to it and start saying this bogey man is no good. And the army is also liable to get corrupted.*
■ SAM MANECKSHAW in *The Sunday Observer*

• *She (Mrs Gandhi) is a charming person. She knows when to speak and when to keep quiet. She never reveals her mind.... Her tragedy is that she doesn't trust anybody—and nobody trusts her. But maybe that is her strength and the secret of her success, too.*
■ ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE in *Gentleman*

• *God said I sent ten Avtars to Bharat, not one to any other country of the world. And see what happened! Countries to whom I sent no Avtars are doing well, and the one to whom I sent ten is going from bad to worse.*
■ KARPOORI THAKUR quoted in the *Hindustan Times*

• *There is a special vulnerability to exploitation in a woman endowed with the fatal combination of intelligence, beauty and gullibility of a kind specific to intelligent, beautiful women.*
■ IQBAL MASUD in the *Indian Express*

• *I should worry less about areas like kissing and sex than areas like humour (in films). We seem to lack it completely.*
■ BIKRAM SINGH in *Debonair*

• *After a while a girl-friend becomes as good as a wife. Today Tina (Munim) and I live in the same house, we share the same roof, the same toothbrush.*
■ RAJESH KHANNA in *Star & Style*

• *I am sick of the men in the star world.*
■ RATI AGNIHOTRI in the *Evening News*

• *How often can a married man with children keep on leaving his family behind and sacrificing his life? Do you think there is only one P.T. Usha in India? There are plenty but who will take the trouble to pick them and train them if there is no incentive?*
■ O.N. NAMBIAR in *Sportsweek*



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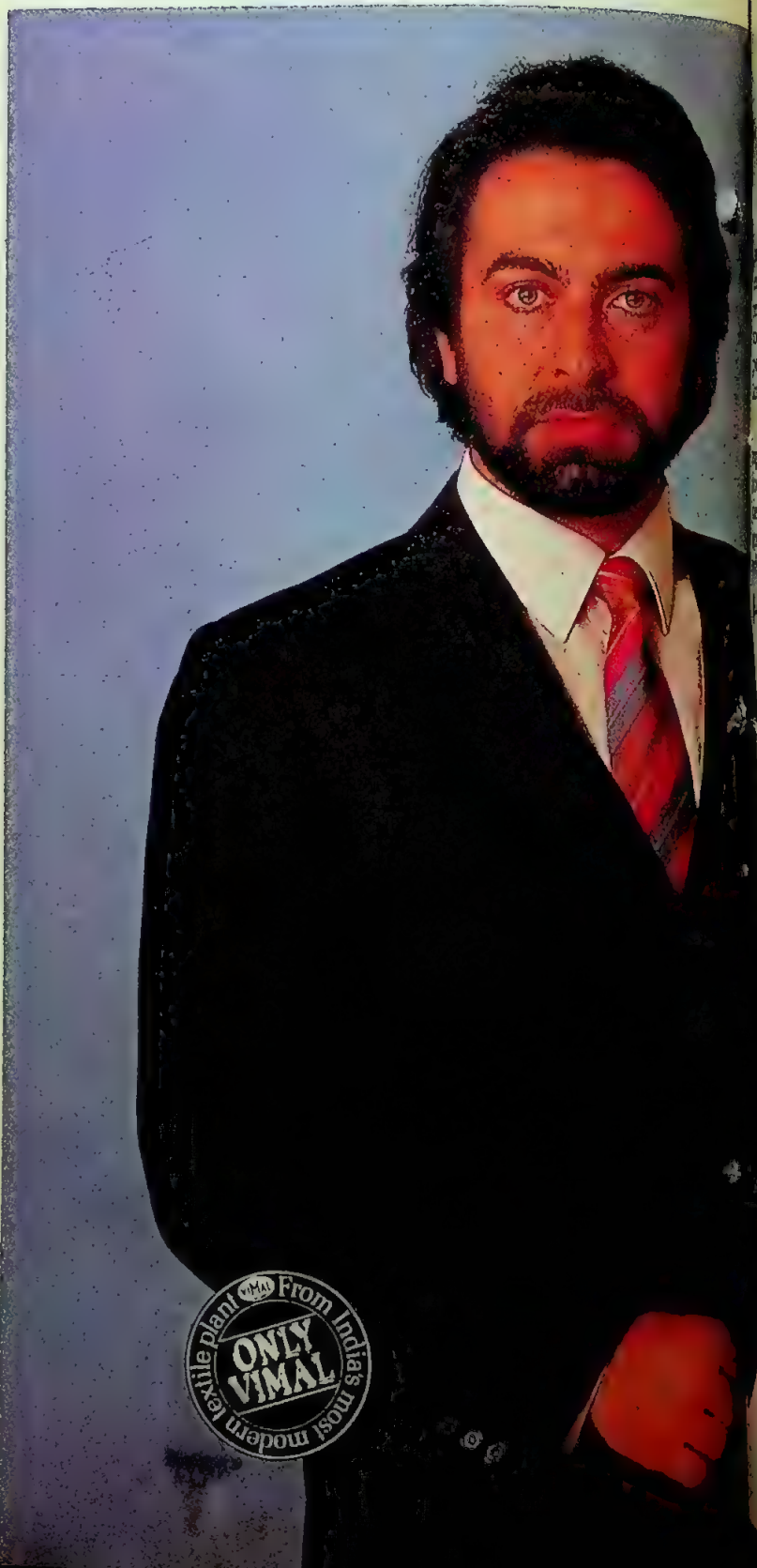
The way you walk, talk, interact with people, speak volumes about you and add to the impressions created by how you look and dress. "All of the ways we behave, the messages and impressions we convey, and the responses we choose to consider or deny, serve a purpose: to establish equilibrium within ourselves and to maintain self-esteem," says Hans F. Heubrer, M.D., a practising psychiatrist in New York.

Your behaviour is changeable.

Every day you get feedback on yourself. Images of you as others see you. Be open to it, and by objectively analysing what others think of you, and matching it to your own honest estimation of yourself, you'll get closer to understanding yourself as well as improving your business and social relationships. As a person, you are constantly evolving, becoming. What you are today, you may not be tomorrow. In other words, your behaviour is changeable. So, a little investment of effort towards creating the "right impression" will help you go places.

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HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT IMPACT.



A leading menswear magazine says "Both in your professional environment and your social realm, your voice and its ability to communicate a unique personality, is an integral part of looking good."

Ted Pollock in "Moving on up" points out "how you sound to another individual, frequently determines the extent of his attention to, and confidence in, what you are saying".

Locate your voice centre.

The best way to assess your voice is obviously to talk into a tape recorder, or better still, a video camera (to give you an idea of the expressions on your face that go with the voice). Do you speak too fast or too slow? How's your pronunciation? Do you find long pauses or sentences punctuated with "err" and "umm", "I mean" etc? Obviously, you need to overcome this. Try and discover your "voice centre". Relax your body, particularly the breathing and vocal muscles, then inhale and exhale and speak with a relaxed tone. Use simple words, and make one point at a time.

The art of negotiation.

Herbert Cohen, author of "You can negotiate anything" points out "your real world is a giant negotiating table, and like it or not, you are a participant". The ability to get things done through effective negotiation is the hallmark of a successful person. To negotiate successfully with colleagues or clients, personality grooming must help build certain qualities. "Persistence, courage, tact, patience, reliability, open-mindedness and self-esteem are major assets in successful negotiating" says Chester L. Karrass, author of "The Negotiating Game".

Think big, but think different.

"You can train your mind to think innovatively", says Roger Von Oech in "A whack on the side of the head". The author who has worked with reputed American Companies, says that most people think along conventional lines, and stresses the need for "creative thinking". Pondering over the same problem as others, but thinking up a new solution which may at first thought sound foolish or impractical but could lead to a promising idea.

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ELUSIVE BOOTY



■ Not many people would turn up their noses at a windfall. After all, it is not every day that the "something for nothing" dream comes true. However, and unfortunately, the cup of joy sometimes runneth away, and among the people who are watching it sprint into the sunset are the residents of Hanumantapuram village in Tamil Nadu.

They had, it appears, spent their entire life tilling the fields and watching MGR and other dashing acronyms when VCR came their way rather suddenly recently. This was a van crammed to the gills with contraband electronic goods, which on the road passing through the village turned in its tracks and crashed into a tree. Immediately the villagers congregated and before anybody could say "fast forward" they grabbed all the stuff inside it including VCR spare parts and zip fasteners—and like Georgie Porgie, ran away.

This brazen act of finders keepers shocked the police so much that they later descended upon the village and proceeded to search it thoroughly. When the operation was over they had managed to recover about half a lakh rupees worth of goods. As no MGR rode out of the sun to help his fans, they had to stand and watch as their newly acquired wealth vanished into the blue.

WRONG CLIENT

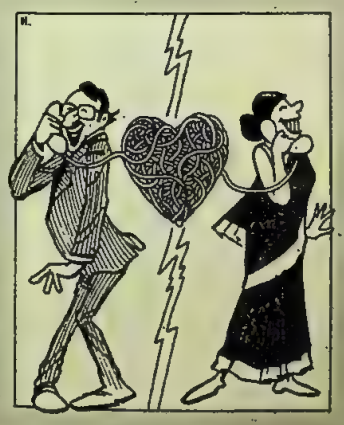
■ A part of Colaba in Bombay teems with shady hotels graced with grand names and by even shadier Arabs who are definitely not of the Zaki Yamani variety. The area also teems with aggressively dressed, perfumed and coiffured women who are definitely of a dubious variety, especially in the dark hours of the evening and the small hours of the morning. The two often meet.

Last fortnight, they didn't. In a sleazy corner of a sleazy cafe a dark-faced Arab sat at a table sipping coffee. A lady slunk into the room, sidled up to him and began soliciting. He shook his head, she stepped up her sales pitch, he refused again, in a soft, sibilant voice clearly nurtured in the mohallas of the mysterious Middle East.



The business talk went on for some time until the Arab finished his ersatz coffee and rose. He grinned, slipped off his headgear and spoke in a voice which carried and which was distinctly a product of the mysterious chawls of Dadar-Byculla. What he said is unprintable but it was something to the effect that he could find better stuff any day at the studios where he worked as an extra.

RIGHT CONNECTION



■ At long, long last, the world knows the purpose of the intricate and faulty telephone network installed throughout the country: it is there to bring people together in holy wedlock and the first signs of its hidden purpose came recently.

A young man in Byculla, Bombay, was dialling, dialling and dialling and getting a wrong number every single time. His finger was just about worn down to a stub and he was going to start using a fresh one when the 20th wrong number he dialled brought balm to the soul in the form of a sweet voice, obviously the property of some sweet young thing. She told him gently that he had got the wrong number and although there is no reason why that statement of fact should start off the greatest love story of the century, it in fact did.

To cut a long-distance call short, the music of violins was heard for some months as the two pursued their affair to the sound of much billing on the part of the telephone department and cooing on the part of the engaged tone when someone else tried to call them. Now they live happily ever after.

FEMALE FAITH

■ The Bella Abzugs who scream from roof-tops that men are no more or no less rational in their dealings with the world than women, got a shot in the arm last fortnight with a survey conducted by Kanpur University. Aided by the University Grants Commission, the survey essentially showed that women are in fact more rational than men when it comes to the 12 signs of the zodiac or a stray black cat.

That finding culled from the reactions of 750 educated men and women will come as a surprise to the stronger sex. In fact, the number of men who shrank at the sight of a cat crossing the road, and felt their hearts sink when somebody sneezed was twice the number of women who had the same sinking feeling.



Businessmen were the most superstitious. Nearly four out of 10 confessed that they consulted fortune-tellers, over half said that they performed pujas to earn higher profits and worshipped God to get him to minimise their sins. If what the survey says is true, the combined faith of Mondale and Ferraro just might pull Reagan off his perch.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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Dutta Sourabh	Pune	8
Sandeep Seth	N. Delhi	10
Suma E. Chandy	Calcutta	11
Anita Sharma	Rourkela	12
Sanjay Khanna	Delhi	13
Din. D.D Pandyan	Mathura	14
Hari Shailaja Murthy	Sindri	15
Kartike Grover	Dehra Dun	16
Srinath C. Kotla	V'Nagaram	18
Arun Joshi	Delhi	21
Ramesh Kr. Panwar	Burnpur	29
Ranjan Kamilya	N. Delhi	SC-1
Rajesh Kumar	Ranchi	SC-2
Ashok Saha	Calcutta	SC-3
Sairaj Kumar	Madras	SC-4
Mini Joseph	Calicut	ST-5
WAITING LIST		
Vikas Maan	Rourkela	31
Ravi Varma	N. Delhi	32
Samina Yunus	Ajmer	34
Prabhakar V.	Pune	35
Rajesh Khanna	N. Delhi	36
Dipankar Nandi	Pune	37
Vivek Kumar	Nagpur	38
Pinak Sinha Ray	Ranchi	39
Gayatri Vasudevan	Calcutta	44
B. Bhattacharya	Bangalore	45
Amit Gupta	N. Delhi	46
Priya Ratnaswamy	Vizag	47
Samir Gupta	Lucknow.	52
Urmila Gupta	C/o 56 Apo	53
Anu Goel	N. Delhi	54
Abhijit Ghosh	W. Bengal	55
Sunita Maheshwari	Hyderabad	56
Nivedita Bhatnagar	Varanasi	57
Sanjay Banerjee	Mysore	60

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S.P. Guru	Madras
Anil Kr Henry	Koraput
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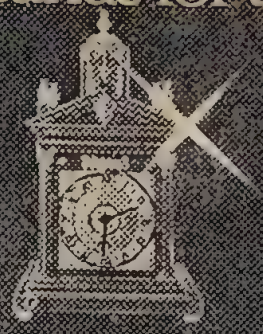
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CONGRESS(I)

A Troubled Mood

EVEN her severest critics cannot but admire Mrs Gandhi's superb sense of timing. It often appears that she is blessed with invisible antennae that tell her just when to pull off one of her celebrated political coups. The antennae were obviously working overtime last fortnight as the bewildering series of moves on the Punjab front once again managed to salvage the sagging fortunes of the party.

And it was none too soon. Immediately before the long-delayed attempts to defuse the Punjab crisis, her party's stock had plummeted to a new low. The sordid Andhra drama was the most visible manifestation *(see opinon poll)*, but there were other related events that gave the impression that the party was floundering along rudderless while indiscipline and indecision ran rampant. It was left to a virtual outsider, New York-based conductor Zubin Mehta, an unabashed admirer of the prime minister, to give expression to what many people were privately saying. In an interview to the *New York Times*, Mehta remarked: "Kashmir, Punjab, Andhra. What is Mrs Gandhi up to?"

Certainly, with a crucial election round the corner, the party's actions seemed politically incomprehensible. The bizarre handling of the Andhra situation was undoubtedly the most serious setback for the party, and, more important, Mrs Gandhi's own credibility. In the snap poll commissioned by INDIA TODAY after N.T. Rama Rao's reinstatement, 67 per cent of those polled refused to believe her statement that she had no knowledge of what was happening. The Andhra debacle witnessed, for the first time in recent years, a sense of outrage even within the party rank and file. Said Subrata Mukherjee, chief whip of the party in the West Bengal Assembly: "If the elections are held in November, then we are in for trouble. If they are held later, we can bank on the fact that the Indian electorate has a poor memory." He was equally candid on the Andhra Pradesh issue. "If the decision was to put him back in office, then that should have been done before the Opposition parties gave the call for a Bharat bandh. This way, it appeared that the Centre had succumbed to pressure."

In private, Congressmen were clearly at a loss to diagnose the palsy that had stricken the party leadership. Those who have always admired Mrs Gandhi's handling of crises were openly wondering whether she had lost her touch. The concern was also tinged with the almost universal realisation that Rajiv Gandhi has fallen far short of expectations and is no substitute for his mother.

Rajiv Gandhi: new chain of command

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



But even publicly, senior party leaders were giving vocal expression to their fears. In Maharashtra, Jambuwantrao Dhote, the Nagpur MP who has lately emerged as the spokesman for the Antulay-Adik faction, stormed through his native Vidharba region openly lashing out at the party high command on every issue, whether it was Andhra, party organisation or prices. In Orissa, Shyam Sunder Mohapatra, the former All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) general secretary who has been demanding a change in the state leadership, presents the classic example of the blatant dissidence that has arisen in recent weeks. "When discipline is applied on me", he said in a 15-page letter to Mrs Gandhi, "one should also glance through the activities of the other general secretaries who are indulging in inter-party confrontation in their own states, throwing ethics to the winds."

That was painfully evident in the recent bedlam at Nagpur created by the unruly delegates of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student wing of the AICC(I). That public display of hooliganism and indiscipline was repeated by Youth Congress(I) supporters at Pondicherry where party general secretary A.K. Antony's car was stoned in a factional fracas.

The dismissal from the party of maverick Karnataka MP F.M. Khan, a protege of former state chief minister Gundu Rao, is another issue that has undermined the party's faith in its invincibility at the hustings and could prove crucial to the all-important question of distribution of seats. Khan is a prominent symbol of the so-called loyalists who formed the "Sanjay Brigade" and his expulsion indicates that the "newcomers" Khan was so incensed about will be accommodated at their expense. But they are hardly likely to cave in without a fight.

In fact, the admittance of newcomers into the party fold is being done with little or no discrimination since the majority of people being currently wooed are from the Opposition camp. The first to take the bait was Satyendra Narain Sinha, powerful Jat leader of Bihar who had been

...spearheaded by Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar in a protracted inter-party wrangle. Sinha is scheduled to return to the Congress(I) fold next fortnight, 15 years after he had parted company with Mrs Gandhi following the 1969 party split.

Others had already made the switch. Abdul Halim Khan, former Uttar Pradesh minister and chief aide of Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) head, H.N.Bahuguna, ditched the DSP to join the Congress(I).He was joined by Pawan Dewan, former Janata minister in Madhya Pradesh, and Mathurdas Mathur, the influential former MP from Rajasthan.

But the new open-door policy is being viewed with extreme displeasure by those in the party who wear the loyalist label. As it is, they were already upset by the recent expansion of the secretariat of the AICC(I) to include three more general secretaries. The new appointments, Chand Ram, A.K.Antony and Abdul Ghafoor, caused considerable disquiet since Chand Ram was a minister in the Janata cabinet at the Centre, Antony fought the party in the Kerala elections in 1980 and Abdul Ghafoor joined the party only this year.

There are other changes that are equally worrying for certain sections of the party. By now, it is common knowledge in party circles that the established Congress(I) practice of the election candidate first being nominated at the District Congress(I) Committee (DCC) level has been abandoned.With Rajiv Gandhi having taken over the entire screening process, the state parliamentary boards no longer exist and the role of the DCC's have been taken over by the new-fangled 'coordination committees'.

THAT, in itself, is bound to create further rifts within the party. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, the nine-member committee is a veritable Noah's ark where Sivaji Ganesan's men sit with followers of G.K.Moopanar and those Congressmen who are in favour of closer ties with Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran.

Says an important state leader:"Unity is still a far cry.The very fact that a nine-member coordination committee was appointed proves that the earlier executive committee was not performing its job. Sivaji Ganesan has been given an independent post as campaign committee chairman but it appears that it is a crumb to silence the Ganesan group."

In Bihar, the induction of Sinha into the party will mean that he is certain to be represented in the coordination committee for that state, something that the other members of the committee will be uncomfortable with.Says one: "How are we expected to sit with Sinha,a man we have fought against all our lives?" The coordination committees have been asked to send to the high command some 1,500 names, an average of three per constituency, to be screened for final selection by the Central Parliamentary Board (CPB).

But party loyalists express fears that the CPB will be a virtual rubber stamp for Rajiv and his 'computer cronies' who, in screening, will ultimately go by the recom-

Mrs Gandhi at the AICC(I) meet

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



mendations of the trusted youth coordinators, a post created by Rajiv last year for keeping discreet tabs on Congressmen. In fact, the entire process is so shrouded in secrecy that for the first time, party supporters face a situation where their destinies are being quietly shaped by unknown and unfamiliar agencies who depend on computer files rather than personal assessment. A typical symbol of the alienation may well be the office of the party Working President, Kamalapati Tripathi, at the AICC(I) headquarters on Akbar Road. His room is seldom opened and the visitors at his residence include very few politicians.

The new chain of command now runs along a network of faceless bureaucrats and technocrats who seem to have little grasp of political reality. The fiasco in Andhra, for instance, was not the decision of the CPB, which has not met in six months, but engineered by two bureaucrats, Makhan Lal Fotedar, Mrs Gandhi's political adviser, and V.S.Tripathi, a former bureaucrat who quit the Government in 1982 to become Mrs Gandhi's official aide.

Tripathi and Fotedar, along with Arun Nehru and Arun Singh, two former corporate executives, represent the think-tank of the party and it is to them that ticket seekers are now starting to flock. However, the image they have is hardly that of mature, street-smart leaders firmly in the saddle.Barely 10 days before the army pull-out from the Golden Temple, Rajiv Gandhi categorically stated in Trivandrum that there "was little possibility" of it happening.He made many similar verbal blunders on the Andhra Pradesh situation giving further credence to the growing feeling that in the monolithic Congress(I), the left hand seldom knows what the right is up to.

The coming weeks will be the most crucial for the party since the inevitable scramble for tickets will bring to the fore all the inner contradictions that plague the party. At the moment, a repeat of the 1980 polls which put 352 Congress(I) members in the 542-member Lok Sabha looks a very remote possibility. In 21 assembly by-elections held earlier this year, the Congress(I) won only nine.Even Vasant Sathe, Union minister for chemicals and fertilisers, told INDIA TODAY last month that he "doubted whether any party would get an absolute majority this time". The party's prospects, therefore, will clearly rest on the dexterity and pace with which Mrs Gandhi manages to reduce her credibility gap and Rajiv manages to reduce his communication gap.

OPINION POLL

Andhra Fall-out

WITH the dismissal of the Bhaskara Rao government, the tortuous political crisis in Andhra Pradesh took another dramatic turn. N.T. Rama Rao was sworn in as chief minister and immediately agreed to call for a vote of confidence in his government as soon as the Assembly convened on September 20, a vote he won decisively.

Some political observers saw the end of the Andhra Pradesh drama as a defeat for Mrs Gandhi, while others felt that by returning NTR, she had managed to extricate herself from the denouement with as little damage as possible.

With general elections round the corner, INDIA TODAY *commissioned the Marketing and Research Group (*MARG*) to conduct a poll to assess the fall-out of the political crisis in Andhra Pradesh and to gauge the prospects for the Congress(I) and the Opposition at the impending general elections. The poll was carried out in Delhi and in eight state capitals across India, including some in the Hindi heartland where the fates of many governments are sealed.*

A total of 2,329 electors (1,223 males and 1,106 females) were interviewed in the nine cities between September 19 and 22. Delhi-313; Bombay-300; Madras-310; Hyderabad-300; Calcutta-300; Patna-200; Bangalore-200; Lucknow-200; and Bhopal-206. The findings of the nine cities were "weighted" to present a total that represents the electorate in the nine cities.

Was the governor right to reinstate NTR?

There is no doubt that the electorate sees the action of Shankar Dayal Sharma in a very positive light—almost 80 per cent feel that he was right to sack Bhaskara Rao and reinstate NTR. The electors in Hyderabad, Patna, Delhi and Madras back NTR's return most enthusiastically (with 87 per cent support). But in Bangalore, Bhopal and particularly Bombay, support for NTR's return is not so overwhelming. NTR enjoys somewhat greater support from women (81 per cent) than among men (77 per cent).

Did Mrs Gandhi have prior knowledge of NTR's dismissal?

On the floor of the Lok Sabha, Mrs Gandhi categorically stated that she had no hand in the dismissal of the NTR government by governor Ram Lal. The electorate has also given little credence to Mrs Gandhi's claim, with just 21 per cent believing her version while 67 per cent do not feel that NTR could have been dismissed without her prior knowledge. Hyderabad, Delhi and Patna more than 75 per cent do not believe Mrs Gandhi. Bombay on the other hand the 'credibility gap' is quite small.

Will the Central Government's handling of the Andhra Pradesh crisis help or hurt the Congress(I)'s performance in the Lok Sabha elections?

While the restoration of NTR to the 'gaddi' may have undone some of the damage of the Congress(I)'s electoral prospects, the entire Andhra Pradesh imbroglio has resulted in a negative impact on the image of the Congress(I). Fifty one per cent feel that the Andhra fiasco will hurt the Congress(I) while 29 per cent believe that the Congress(I) has emerged well out of the crisis. The remaining 20 per cent are undecided. In Bombay and Bhopal the electorate is almost evenly divided while around two-thirds of the electorate in Delhi, Hyderabad and Lucknow believe that the cause of the Congress(I) has been damaged by the recent goings-on in Andhra Pradesh.

Among men, 58 per cent feel that the Congress(I) will be hurt, while only 24 per cent believe that it will benefit. Among women, while the balance of opinion remains unfavourable it is less negative than the men as 44 per cent said the Congress(I)'s electoral prospects will be hurt and 33 per cent said they would benefit.

The state of the nation

Electors were asked whether things were going well or badly for the country. The overwhelming view (73 per cent) is that things are going badly, a view particularly strong in Patna, Calcutta and Delhi (80 per cent and more).

Can the opposition parties successfully run the country in a coalition?

With general elections just around the corner it should be a matter of some concern stress for the Opposition that 44 per cent feel that they would not be able to rule the country successfully in a coalition. Forty-two per cent take a pro-opposition view while 14 per cent are undecided.

Scepticism about the Opposition is the greatest in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Delhi. In Lucknow and Calcutta, views are evenly divided. In Bombay, Bhopal, Madras and Patna the electors feel on balance that the Opposition can run the country successfully in a coalition.

The best person to lead the opposition parties

In the INDIA TODAY-MARG poll, Atal Behari Vajpayee clearly emerges as the front horse in the "Opposition leadership stakes". His greatest strength lies in Delhi

THE INDIA TODAY/MARG OPINION POLL

	TOTAL	BOMBAY	CALCUTTA	DELHI	MADRAS	LUCKNOW	PATNA	BHOPAL	BANGALORE	HYDERABAD
Was the governor right in reinstating NTR?										
Right	79	60	84	88	87	86	89	73	70	88
Wrong	11	21	7	6	3	10	11	14	21	6
Undecided	10	19	9	6	10	4	-	13	9	6
Did Mrs Gandhi have prior knowledge of NTR's dismissal?										
Yes	21	36	18	15	14	28	20	20	21	10
No	67	47	73	80	73	65	78	58	55	84
Undecided	12	17	9	5	13	7	2	22	24	6
Congress(I)'s prospects										
Improved	29	40	24	22	21	27	30	37	44	23
Worsened	51	39	50	70	58	62	57	42	33	64
Undecided	20	21	26	8	21	11	13	21	23	13
The state of the nation										
Good	19	21	15	16	16	27	15	42	26	17
Bad	73	67	83	80	67	67	84	48	60	75
Can't say	8	12	2	4	17	6	1	10	14	8
Can an opposition coalition be successful?										
Yes	42	45	47	39	42	45	55	42	21	30
No	44	34	45	53	36	49	44	36	60	50
Undecided	14	21	8	8	22	6	1	22	19	20
Best leader of the combined Opposition										
A.B. Vajpayee	22	21	7	55	7	40	14	40	18	36
Jyoti Basu	15	1	49	3	3	1	14	2	-	1
Chandra Shekhar	10	7	5	17	12	10	24	11	14	4
Morarji Desai	9	8	9	7	12	10	26	14	3	3
NTR	7	3	3	6	14	5	8	6	7	27
Charan Singh	5	4	1	6	5	26	13	9	3	3
Ramakrishna Hegde	3	3	1	1	5	1	-	1	15	3
Others	6	9	-	-	19	7	1	17	6	6
Can't say	15	32	6	5	23	-	-	-	31	14
None	8	11	19	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Electoral preferences										
Congress(I)	-	34	41	47	24	49	48	53	41	21
Lok Dal	-	3	-	2	-	12	8	2	-	-
CPM	-	-	37	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
BJP	-	11	2	24	2	18	13	16	8	21
AIADMK	-	-	-	-	22	-	-	-	-	-
CPI	-	-	5	-	-	1	16	-	3	-
DMK	-	-	-	-	19	-	-	-	-	-
JANATA	-	18	3	5	10	7	15	9	36	1
Telugu Desam (NTR)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
Others	-	8	12	22	6	14	1	-	8	4
Can't say	-	26	-	-	16	-	-	19	5	6

Lucknow and Bhopal and a third of the electorate in Hyderabad also backs him.

Next comes Jyoti Basu but his support is virtually non-existent outside Calcutta (where 49 per cent chose him) and Patna (14 per cent). Then comes Chandra Shekhar (10 per cent), followed by Morarji Desai (9 per cent), the new hero NTR (7 per cent) and Charan Singh (5 per cent). While NTR's main support comes from Hyderabad and Madras, he has pockets of support in the other cities also.

As many as 23 per cent (and over 40 per cent in Bombay and Bangalore) were unable to specify any name for the combined opposition leader.

Voting intentions for the Lok Sabha elections

All respondents were asked: "If an election to the Lok Sabha were to take place tomorrow, which party would you vote for?"

Despite its recent problems in Andhra Pradesh and despite the electorate's view that things are going badly for the country, the INDIA TODAY-MARG poll shows that it is the Congress(I) that has emerged the strongest in almost all the cities.

There has been no major dent in the Congress(I) popularity in the Hindi heartland. In Delhi, Lucknow, Patna and Bhopal, over 50 per cent of the electorate back the Congress(I) in all these cities. Except Patna, BJP is the second most popular party. In Patna the CPI, Janata and BJP are running neck-and-neck for the second slot.

In Calcutta the Congress(I) holds a narrow lead over the CPM (41 per cent vs 37 per cent) but if votes for the Left Front partners are taken into account the Left Front as a whole is slightly ahead. In Bombay too, the INDIA TODAY-MARG poll shows the Congress(I) in the lead (34 per cent) with the Janata (18 per cent) and the BJP (11 per cent) following.

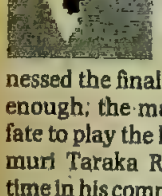
In the three southern cities, the position of the Congress(I) varies city by city. In Bangalore it leads the ruling Janata Party (41 per cent vs 36 per cent), but in Madras the Congress(I) is only marginally ahead of its ally, the AIADMK (24 per cent vs 22 per cent) with the DMK a bit further behind (19 per cent).

In Hyderabad where the latest crisis began and ended the Telugu Desam (NTR) has support of 47 per cent of the electorate. While the Congress(I) is backed by 21 per cent, the BJP has jumped up in popular support with 24 per cent. Poor Bhaskara Rao has been left with virtually no backing at all which should make him look for a "homecoming" in one of the other parties.



ANDHRA PRADESH

Restoration Rites



THE WAGNERIAN drama in Andhra Pradesh came to its crashing, anticlimactic finale last fortnight, but few in the audience of 750 million believed that they had witnessed the final act. Least of all, ironically enough, the man seemingly ordained by fate to play the lead role all his life: Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. For the second time in his comparatively brief and stormy political incarnation, the former matinee idol had triumphed over what his delirious fans perceive as the Goddess of Evil, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Or, as it was in this particular act, her misguided minions.

Playing the most demanding role of his cinematic and political career, immediately after undergoing a heart bypass surgery, NTR returned to his usurped chief minister's chair last fortnight to a hero's welcome when Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma, the replacement for Ram Lal, the perceived villain of the piece, was forced to demand the resignation of the pretender to the throne, Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, for failing to prove his majority within the stipulated time.

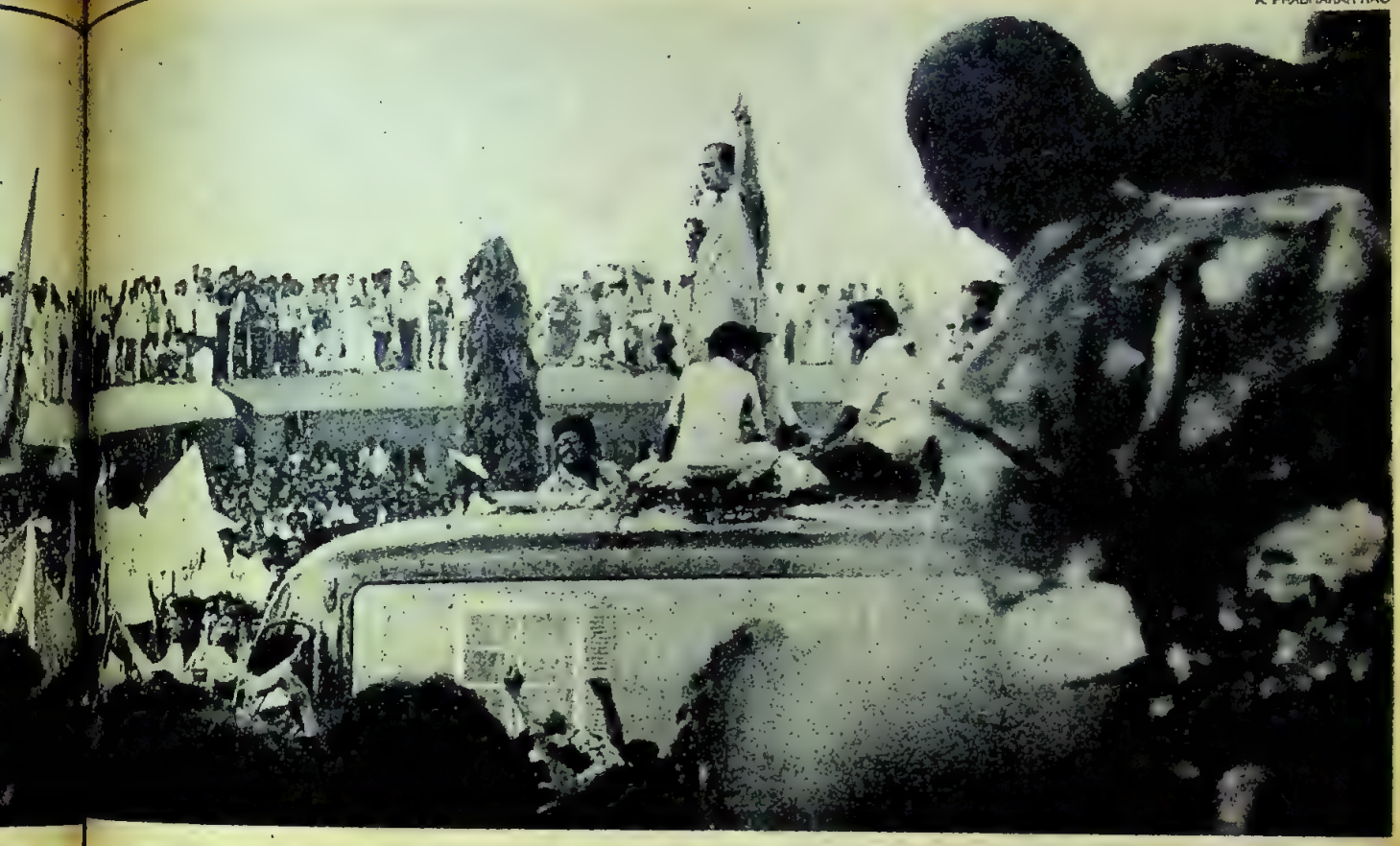
The victory celebrations were equally epic in scope and grandeur. On the same evening he was reinstated, the drawn and haggard hero entered Hyderabad's Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium to a scene more suited to the Coliseum in Ceasar's time. Over a lakh of people cheered themselves hoarse as the galaxy of opposition leaders delivered thundering speeches. In characteristic style, NTR gratefully presented mementoes to the MLA's who had stood by him through the five-week crisis.

But there was a sobering element in all the celebratory euphoria. The jamboree at the stadium was billed as a *praja vijayotsavam*, or people's victory festival and aptly so. Not since the 1977 elections has the country been witness to such a powerful expression of people power. Even NTR, the hero of the hour, had no hesitation in giving the people of Andhra their just due.

But the real sobering element was evident in the reinstated chief minister most of all. The baptism of fire for NTR, has, in many ways, been something of a godsend. It was his imperious arrogance, his monumental ego and his inability to trust those around him that had led him to the precipice. Now, left with 145 MLA's of the original Telugu Desam, and 19 non-Congress(I) MLA's in support, NTR has a wafer-thin majority as compared to the steam-roller majority of 199 in the 295 member house he enjoyed earlier. That alone should curb his political recklessness in the days ahead. His impetuosity, however, seems undiminished. In a fit of misplaced gratitude, NTR offered cabinet posts to members of the non-Congress (I) opposition MLA's who had lent him their staunch support in his recent ordeal. They included Venkaiah Naidu of the BJP, S.Jaipal Reddy (Janata Party), N.Raghava Reddy (CPI-M) and the CPI's M. Rajab Ali. Their induction would have been a political anachronism, which is why they politely declined the offer. But they will still play crucial roles in the coming months as advisers on strategy, specially Venkaiah Naidu and Jaipal Reddy, who guided him adroitly through the minefields of the past few weeks. Says Naidu: "NTR has shown he has it in him. He can now build on that with proper advice."

Proper advice is what NTR will clearly need most now. His unorthodox style of functioning during his 20 months of power had prevented him from locating

A. PRABHAKAR RAO



NTR addressing supporters after being reinstated as chief minister

talent among his dwindled flock. He alienated Bhaskara Rao by his mistrust and lent heavily for advice on just two people: Parvataneni Upendra, a former railway employee who is general secretary of the party and a Rajya Sabha MP, and Chandrababu Naidu, his controversial son-in-law who is resented by NTR loyalists for his having been a Congress(I) minister who lost the state elections and then promptly made a rear-door entry into the Telugu Desam.Neither have NTR's former cabinet ministers displayed much capability in the way they have run their ministries.On the other hand, there were capable people who were sidelined. Says one, Duggubati Chowdari, an articulate MLA who deserted NTR:"I was not allowed to function as an MLA. My talent was being stifled.Only those who touched NTR's feet were rewarded and incompetent men were given positions of authority.We took a stand and walked out.There is no going back now." Adds Ramoji Rao, Andhra Pradesh's newspaper baron:"He should learn from his mistakes and become a better judge of men. Otherwise, he will find himself in trouble again."

But there are signs that NTR has learnt from the lessons of the last five weeks. At a visible level, he has forsaken the practice of allowing people to touch his feet. At another level, he has become more thoughtful and introspective, measuring his words carefully before answering queries from the press which is in sharp contrast to his earlier, rapid-fire dialogues. Above all, he has been shocked into the belated realisation that he is mortal like everybody else and therefore prone to mistakes.His decision to retain the retirement age for government servants at 58 years shows a reversal of his earlier unpopular stand and means that he is now prepared to reassess his performance.

He has also displayed a rare determination and decisiveness in his bid to iron out the creases, as evidenced by the promptness with which he ordered the arrests of MLA's S.S. Owaisi, the pro tem speaker during Bhaskara Rao's brief and inglorious tenure, Amanullah Khan, Baquer Agha and P.Ramaswamy and 15 others on charges of inciting the September 9 riots in Hyderabad which claimed 31 lives. The MLA's had been arrested earlier but had been released by the Bhaskara Rao government.

There are other signs that NTR is moving fast to cover his vulnerable spots. His son-in-law is reportedly being packed off to Tirupati to run a hotel business and NTR himself is taking his time before appointing new ministers in his cabinet and filling other key vacancies. He is also said to be in favour of forming a think-tank to oversee progress and advise the Government on important decisions.

The new attitude is reflected in the statements of his closest supporters like Finance Minister N.Srinivasulu Reddi, who says: "The party split because of Bhaskara Rao's hunger for power. But we have learnt our lessons. We will be more careful in future." Adds the Janata Party's Jaipal Reddy: "NTR now actually listens to advice even if it is unasked for."

But it is still a long time before NTR can sit securely in the saddle again.The day NTR was sworn in for the second time as chief minister, Rajiv Gandhi warned that "The story is not over yet", a clear indication that the Congress(I) still harbours hopes of unseating NTR. At the moment, however, that seems like wishful thinking. The massive wave of popular support for NTR after his dismissal will take some time to abate and the only possibility is if NTR collapses on the weight of his own mistakes.Already, there is pressure on him to convert the popular support into another mandate by dissolving the Assembly and calling for fresh elections.Bhaskara Rao has already written to the governor in anticipation of such a move, stating that he should be consulted if the Assembly is dis-

solved. Even though Congress(I) leaders in Andhra Pradesh admit that they will suffer badly in an election at this stage, it would be an inadvisable move on NTR's part. He is, for one, in poor health and the rigours of another street campaign will undoubtedly weaken him further.

At the moment, with general elections looming large, the Congress(I) is hardly likely to launch another onslaught in Andhra Pradesh having been badly mauled already and their credibility at rock bottom.NTR's biggest worry at the moment, ironically enough, is the people who were instrumental in restoring his throne to him.If he does not heed the advise to change his style of functioning and mend his earlier ways, the next time round, the drama might just have a different ending. —S. VENKAT NARAYAN and AMARNATH K. MENON in Hyderabad

INTERVIEW

'I've no Secret Ambitions'

THE WOUNDED tiger has done it. Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, 62, refused to be browbeaten by the Congress(I) manipulations in his Telugu Desam Party and, on September 16, exactly a month after his sudden dismissal, was recalled and asked to form the Government in Andhra Pradesh. Keeping his flock of MLA's together, with the national Opposition and the press behind him, Rama Rao dealt a body-blow to Mrs Gandhi. What long-term effect this will have on the Congress(I) only the coming Lok Sabha elections will tell, but there is no doubt the experience has made Rama Rao a wiser politician and a mellower man. On September 21, just one day after proving his majority in the Andhra Assembly, he spoke to Senior Editor S. VENKAT NARAYAN *and Correspondent* AMARNATH K. MENON *in Hyderabad. Extracts from the exclusive interview:*

Q. *How do you look back on your experiences during the month-long vanavasa?*

A. It was not *vanavasa*. It was *janavasa*. I was not in the jungle after governor Ram Lal dismissed me. I spent most of my time with people... they gave me the real support. It enabled me to gauge the people's love for me.

Q. *Do you think Mrs Gandhi was behind all this?*

A. I don't want to blame anyone. I look at it as an occurrence, that's all.

Q. *Your remarks about Mrs Gandhi have led to speculation that your attitude towards her has softened.*

A. I telephoned to thank her after the swearing-in ceremony. After all, she's the prime minister. I was never harsh either with the Centre or her. So, where's the question of being soft now? The Telugu Desam policy on this has not changed. We are interested in the development of our state and we will continue to ask for funds and justice for it.

Q. *When Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma called you to form the Government, how did you feel?*

A. I had the majority all along and it was an arbitrary decision on Ram Lal's part to have dismissed me. It is true I was sceptical. The new governor has righted the wrong.

Q. *There are reports of gross irregularities committed by Nadendla Bhaskara Rao during his month-short regime. Will you inquire into them?*

> **Telugu Desam was founded for the welfare of the people of Andhra Pradesh. Making it a national party would be a contradiction in terms.**

A. Let me go through what has been done. I will then decide what to do.

Q. *Will you advise the governor to dissolve the Assembly and hold fresh elections to wipe out the Congress(I) and the Bhaskara Rao faction?*

A. I have not thought about this so far. I cannot say what I may do.

Q. *Do you propose to fight the Lok Sabha elections?*

A. Yes, the Telugu Desam will fight the Lok Sabha election. In view of the support the non-Congress(I) opposition parties extended to us, we will consider sharing some of the 42 seats with them.

Q. *There are about 25 parliamentary constituencies in states bordering Andhra where Telugu-speaking people are the majority. Will you start units of the Telugu Desam here and field candidates in the Lok Sabha poll?*

A. I have not thought about this either. But, if people from these areas are keen on setting up state units we can certainly consider the idea.

Q. *Do you have plans to convert the Telugu Desam into a national party?*

A. Telugu Desam was founded for the welfare of the people of Andhra Pradesh. Making it a national party would be a contradiction in terms.

Q. *Are you a candidate for prime minister in the next election?*

A. I have primarily concerned myself with the development of my state. My first obligation is to my state. It is true that I have been trying to unite the opposition parties. That doesn't mean I am entertaining any secret ambitions. I am happy where I am. If the Opposition parties want my help that's a different matter altogether.

Q. *Did opposition unity figure in your talks with leaders who came to Hyderabad for the victory parade?*

A. Not really. They came to applaud the MLA's who stood by me.

Q. *In view of the agitation in Rayalaseema, have you changed your mind about supplying Krishna water to Madras for drinking purposes?*

A. We took a firm decision about that and it stands.

Q. *The Muslims appear to be unhappy with you. What do you propose to do to bring about Hindu-Muslim amity?*

A. I am sorry about the recent communal troubles here. No community is interested in creating communal riots —they are politically inspired. I will deal firmly with such elements.

Q. *The bureaucracy appears alienated from you.*

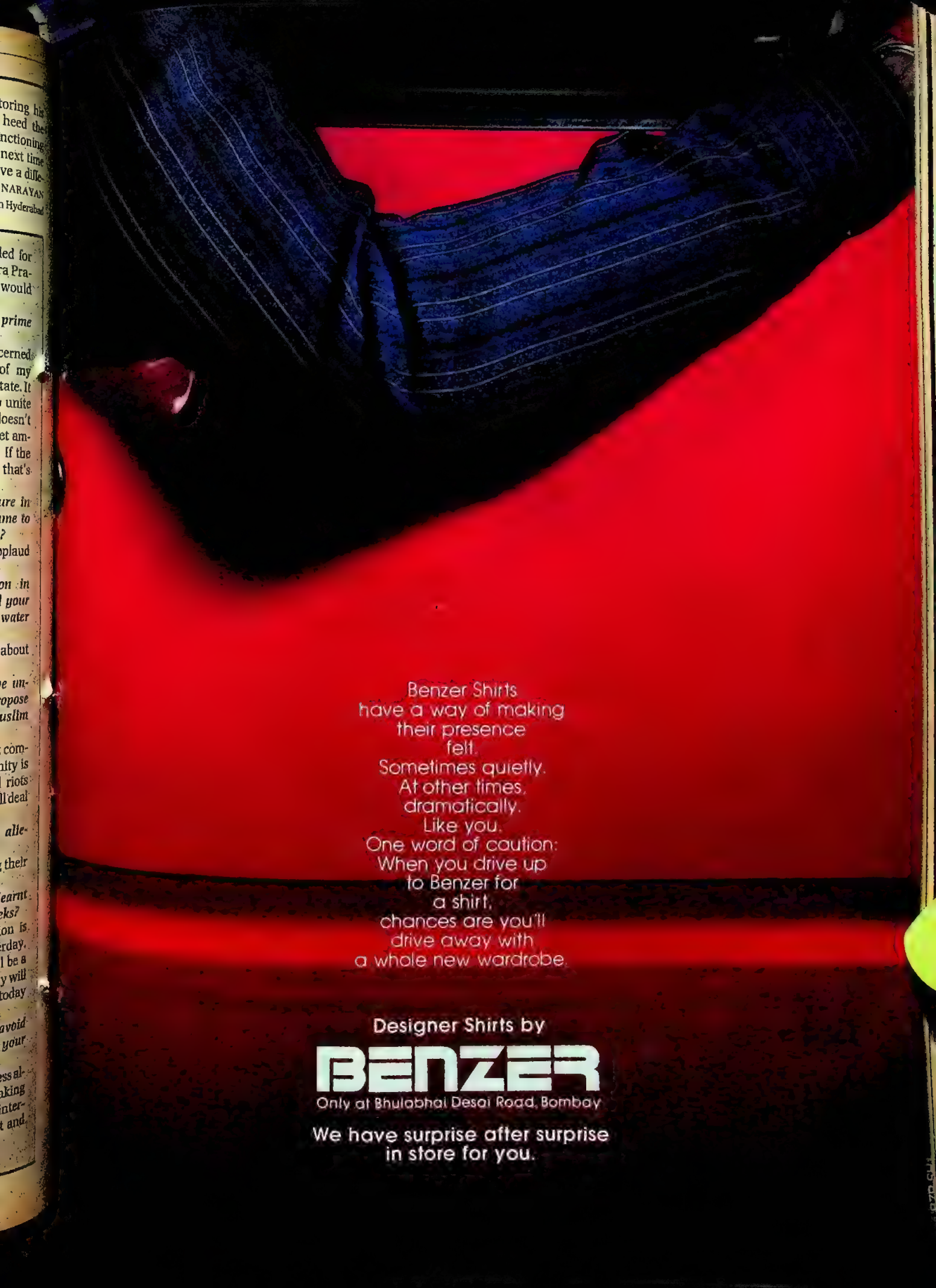
A. That's not true. I am getting their full cooperation.

Q. *What lessons have you learnt from the events of the past five weeks?*

A: You see, human civilisation is progressing. Yesterday was yesterday, today is today and tomorrow shall be a new day. What happened yesterday will certainly influence what I may do today and tomorrow.

Q. *What will you do now to avoid criticism about interference by your relatives?*

A: I'm sorry but these are baseless allegations. Nobody in my family is taking interest in politics. They have not interfered in my political life in the past and won't do so in future either.

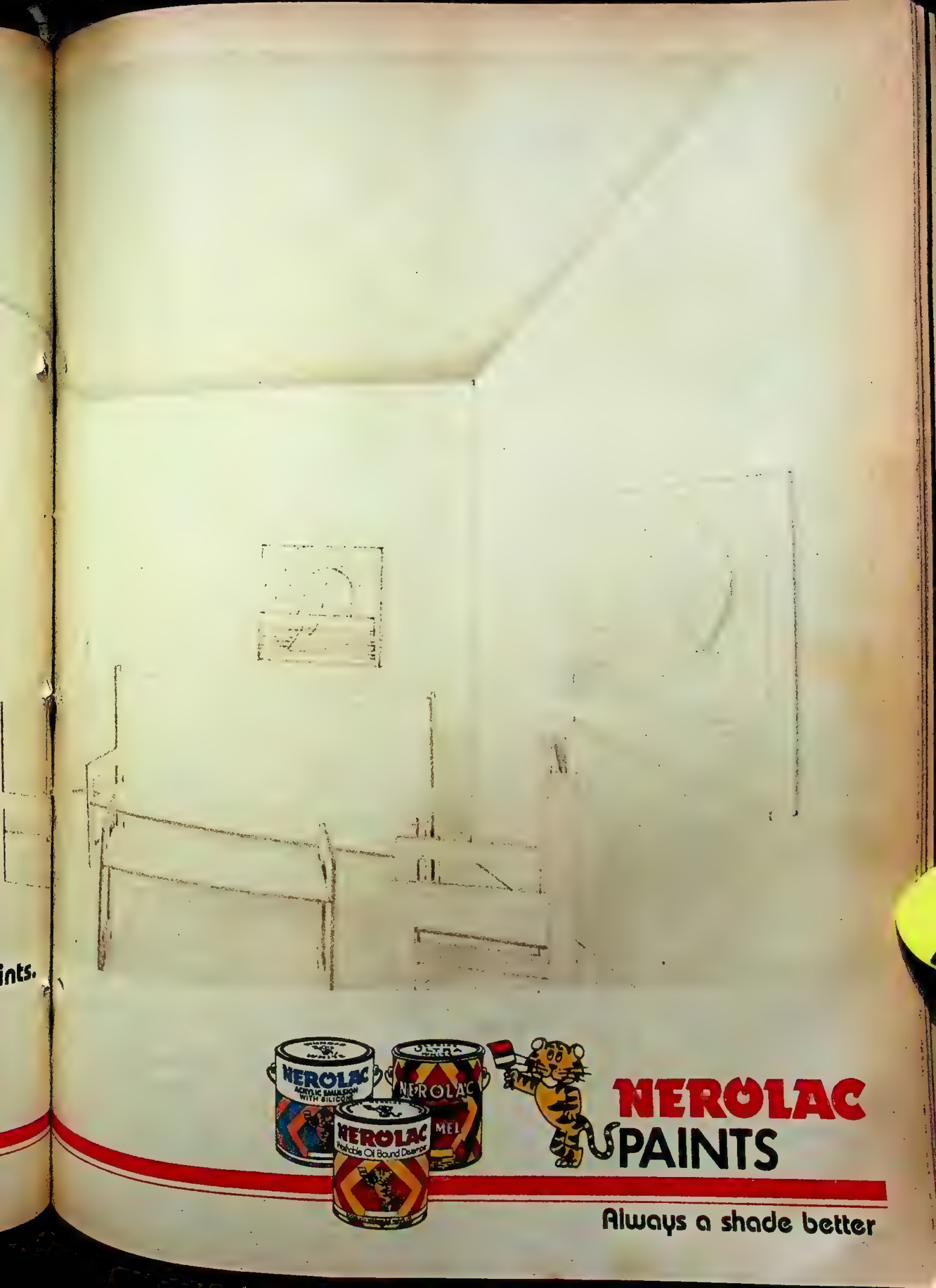

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NSUI

Running Wild

"Whenever the Congress has met at Nagpur it has led to a decisive turn being given to the course of Indian politics. The session held at Nagpur in August 1920 saw Mahatma Gandhi emerging as the undisputed leader. The session held here in January 1959 led to Mrs Indira Gandhi becoming the Congress president and her giving it a new direction and decisive purpose. The convention of the National Students Union of India (I) which is ongoing in the city today at a critical time can be expected to be similarly epochal."

—editorial in Nagpur Times on September 12, 1984

AS PREDICTED by the *Nagpur Times*, the two-day first ever convention of the National Students Union of India (I) (NSUI), the youth wing of the Congress(I) turned out to be epochal enough, but not quite the way the newspaper had imagined. Instead the horrified populace of Nagpur were left thoroughly shaken after a display of vandalism, wildness and obscene behaviour by some of the dubious delegates who came to attend the convention from all over the country. "Nagpur is not likely to forget or forgive the NSUI convention in a hurry," said Sharad Bhasme, general secretary of the Maharashtra Pradesh Youth Congress (S), Nagpur, "and yet the Congress(I) has still not even apologised to the city."

Though the AICC(I) has appointed an inquiry committee to look into the fiasco, the leadership's intentions are clearly more inclined towards covering up the misdeeds and pinning the blame on the usual whipping boy, the unseen RSS infiltrators, rather than conducting an honest stock-taking of the political culture which condones such unpardonable behaviour. Says Ramesh Chennithala, 27, MLA from Kerala, who heads the NSUI, "My first conclusion is that in overall terms the convention was a grand success. We could mobilise such a massive force." He airily dismissed the rowdy behaviour of the members as "over-enthusiasm of the student community" and a "planned conspiracy by RSS elements". Avinash Pande, convenor of the Nagpur convention and president of the Maharashtra NSUI goes as far as to state, "For me this was a very good experience which I will remember all my life. My only regret is that I could not manage the press."

The NSUI's righteous indignation at the allegations might have been somewhat vindicated last week when it won the Nagpur University elections for which scores of Maharashtra leaders and ministers descended on the city. But the indirect student election by college representatives who had been elected before the convention is not an accurate indicator of public sentiment. Says Nitin Gadkari, president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, "This was no student election but a political election in which money and power pressures were used freely."

Though local newspapers acting on orders from their owners have played down the extent of the damage caused by the students, tales of the delegates' hooliganism are the talk of the town. Two weeks after the convention, the city's Pragati Hall, where the 600 delegates from Bhiwandi, Kalyan, Thane and Raigad were gheraoed by irate residents is littered with bottles, smashed window panes, tube lights and broken furniture. The local populace were provoked to this action after the students beat up two labourers, broke cycles, made obscene gestures and objectionable remarks at local women. When the residents marched up to the Pragrati Hall to complain, the students locked themselves in and pelted the mob with stones. It was only after two and a half hours of violence that the police finally broke up the mob.

Ironically enough, even the city's red-light area, Ganga Jamna which houses about 2,000 prostitutes was not spared. Says Digambar Gotta, a paanwalla, "The tradition here is that we never close. Even when the rest of the city is under curfew, Ganga Jamna remains open. But thanks to these ruffians, for the first time in the history of Nagpur our area was cordoned off by the police and all business came to a

ASHOK SAWANO





Destruction at the kitchen (above) and stolen goods recovered from delegates

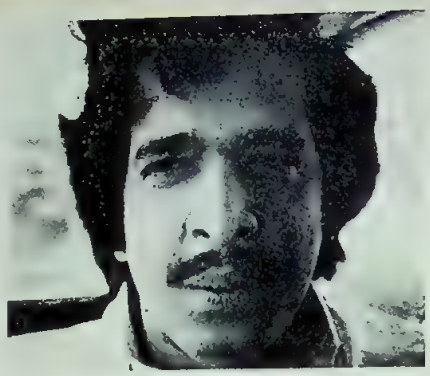
standstill. No one dared to come out of their houses." Shantabhai Patil, president of Amrapalli Sanghatna, the prostitutes union, has demanded that Rajiv Gandhi should compensate the prostitutes of the area for the loss of business for two days.

According to Kashikar, a local soap dealer, the delegates mostly from the north visited the area armed with hockey sticks. "Ask any of the sports dealers in Sadar and you will find that their entire supply of hockey sticks has been bought up." Kamubhai Gopal, a member of the Sanghatna adds, "The boys didn't even bother to take off their delegate badges." The delegates allegedly forced their way into the houses there and several prostitutes were injured. Refuting these allegations Chennithala maintains, "I am totally denying this red-light district talk. Can anyone give me photographic evidence? How can outsiders from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab find this place? It is difficult even for me though I have been to Nagpur five times."

AT THE newly constructed MLA's hostel, the Public Works Department employees are still working overtime on repairs since the hostel accommodated some of the delegates and was the site of many a brawl. Apparently the Orissa group amassed an arsenal of stones, and not to be left out, the Punjab delegates housed in a nearby hostel and the Bengal group in the MLA's hostel indulged in a massive brawl. Reports that two Punjab delegates had revolvers in their possession did not prompt the police to take any action. The police instead watched impassively on the plea that they had orders not to disturb the delegates.

The delegates further horrified the employees of the hostel when on departing, some of them stripped the rooms bare of furnishings. They walked away with telephones, fittings, dhurries, and light bulbs. When the hostel employees contacted the police they were told to contact Shrikant Jichkar former Maharashtra minister and coordinator of the convention.

However in the absence of timely preventive action, most of the delegates got away with the loot and only 11 were apprehended. Those arrested belonged to the Bombay delegation and were singled out due to the rivalry between them and the Maharashtra NSUI. The Bombay group precipitated matters by arriving at the Nagpur station early and occupying the bogies meant for themselves as well as those for the Maharashtra NSUI. It was when the Maharashtra delegates who found themselves locked out staged a demonstration that the police finally intervened. The other delegates getting wind of the police arrival quickly disposed of the loot out of the train windows. Though a large amount of stolen property was recovered, a great deal got away.



NSUI President Chennithala: denials

As reports of eve teasing, bus hijacking, looting and unseemly behaviour increased, the irate residents of the city took the law into their own hands on the last day of the convention. In the process, there is every possibility that even innocent delegates might have had to face the fury of the mob. Said a Punjab delegate who received a sound thrashing, "I will never utter the name of Nagpur again as long as I live." If their arrival was marked with great expectations and bravado, their inglorious exit was far from it. Most of them slunk away with their badges discreetly hidden and the police had even prepared a contingency plan to cordon off the departing delegates from an irate public.

But all this did not deter the delegates from making a further nuisance of themselves on their homebound journey. The delegate train from Nagpur to Sawai Madhopur was halted for two hours at the Narmada bridge, while the boys had a leisurely dip. They then climbed into the signal cabin, broke the water level measuring instrument and threw it out. And there seems to have been no dearth of these unsavoury incidents—with two students being arrested for possession of dangerous weapons, students from Haryana and Agra clashing violently over seat allocations, and the train being delayed by six hours near Pune while some delegates looted wayside stalls. On reaching Pune the delegates held up the train demanding food and on several routes there were complaints of boys stoning passing buses injuring passengers. Once again Chennithala passes the buck by insisting that all this is part of the RSS conspiracy.

The local *pranth pracharak* of the RSS at Nagpur, Mohan Bhagat, is quite resigned about these allegations. According to him, "We are easy scapegoats. Nagpur people know who has done what. If we had done anything, would people allow us to continue our shakhas in this city?" And despite the RSS conspiracy theory that the Congress(I) maintains, the fact remains that the indisciplined and violent streak in the boys came to the fore largely as a result of the shabby organisation and infighting within the party's youth divisions.

This was evident by the chaotic organising of the convention itself with the chairmen of the accommodation, transport and catering committees at loggerheads with each other and with the chief coordinator. Around 30,000 delegates were expected and 47,000 turned up, half of whom did not even pay their registration fees, with the result that a cheque for Rs 2.4 lakh made out to the Maharashtra State Transport Corporation bounced. Food arrangements too left much to be desired and on the first day many delegates went without food. An unruly demonstration by the delegates for food even as Rajiv Gandhi was making his speech earned them Mrs Gandhi's wrath. In her speech on September 13, she said, "If you cannot do without food for a day, how will you make sacrifices in the cause of the nation?"

However sacrifices seem to have been the last thing on the minds of the delegates since many of them had come along to have a good time at someone else's expense. And the Youth Congress(I) leaders who in their eagerness to impress by increasing their quota, invited all and sundry for the meet are probably rueing the day they did so. For if anything, rather than impress, the delegates defeated the purpose of the convention.

—COOMI KAPOOR

Pragrati Hall after the meet

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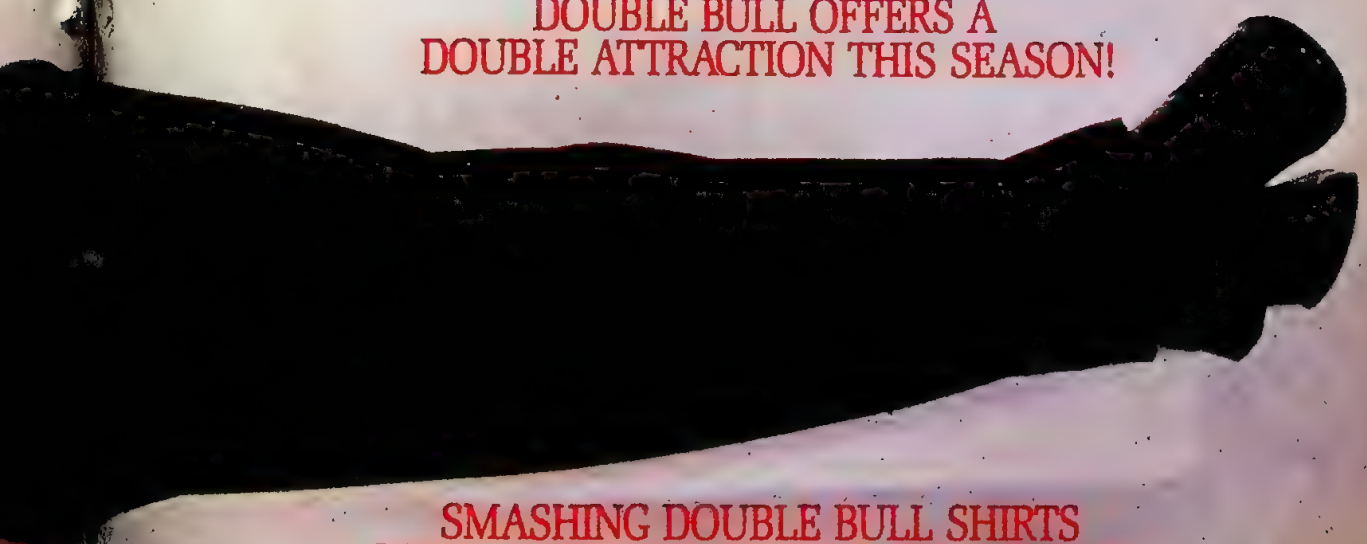
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Mrs Gandhi addressing the meet and (left) a view of the delegates: free for all

MAHILA CONGRESS

A Disastrous Debut

ECHOES from Nagpur seemed to reverberate in Bangalore last fortnight as the first session of the Mahila Congress got under way. The largest gathering ever of women (25,000 delegates) turned out to be the biggest farce as well. Even as cries of "Long live Indira Gandhi" and "We are all one" rent the air, all was not at peace in the large gathering. Delegates huddled under a festooned pandal squabbled with each other over seating space. As a Bengali woman, dressed in Congress white, fought her way to where the Marathi women, dressed in shiny gold-laced saris, were seated, she was rebuffed curtly, "If you are not a Marathi, then go and sit somewhere else."

More farcical was the fact that the myriad problems plaguing Indian women were ignored in favour of sermons on 'unity, integration and world peace'. Unfortunately neither was unity and integration much in evidence. The delegates rushed around, trampled on toes and sari hems, cursed each other and broke flowerpots in the struggle to get a glimpse of Mrs Gandhi. When a few obstinate women refused to sit down, another more obstinate group of women grabbed a constable's *danda* and simply swatted them down. Said a shocked activist: "I don't think these women need liberating. They already are."

Mrs Gandhi herself got jostled around when a bunch of women—displaying all their *stree shakti* (woman power)—fell over each other in trying to touch the venerable prime minister. Visibly furious, Mrs Gandhi told her security men to control them as she delivered her speech on world integration and peace. Then, in a typically female gesture, she asked one of the women on the dais to pick out the petals that had messed up her hairdo. The crowd went wild.

Mrs Gandhi in her rambling inaugural speech, skimmed over every topic except those concerning women's problems. Women should not shed their traditional role as home-makers, women should concentrate on building the character of their children, the future citizens of India. On and on continued Mrs Gandhi's pet theme of "unity, national integration and world peace". "Women should raise their voice in favour of peace," said the nation's leader, "they should fight against nuclear weapons. The important question is that of unity and integrity of the country."

The next day was Sunday and so few people turned up for the convention that there were more empty chairs visible than women. For many of the delegates, it was time for sightseeing or shopping. Another woman, Rimawi Lalringliana, who had travelled five days and nights from Mizoram to attend the meet, decided to go to church instead.

While much of it turned out to be an eyewash, the Mahila convention was called with serious aims—to "build new bonds of unity among Indian women" and to raise the standards of what it calls "the single largest group of backward citizens in the country". The Mahila Congress was formed November last to give women an independent identity in the Congress(I) instead of just being a "wing" or a "section". Since then, it has been organising state-level political training camps and district conventions to work out measures that would ensure Indian women their just position in society.

The Bangalore convention, however, was reduced to an election campaign kick-off with the express design of boosting the party's singularly sagging image. Admitted Margaret Alva, the vivacious convenor of the Mahila Congress: "The basic purpose was to mobilise women in large numbers and bring them together to reiterate their support to the Congress(I)." Initially, the theme of the convention was to be "education for equality and unemployment" but with the elections looming it was hastily changed to "secularism, national integration and world peace"

The important resolutions—including the only relevant demand of a 20 per cent seat reservation for women in the elections—which the convention was to have discussed were casually dismissed. When Chairperson Begum Abida Ahmed put them before the depleted house for approval, the delegates mechanically raised their hands in consent. Said Abida Ahmed: "Now a time has come to start a new era which will be called a women's era." But if last fortnight's congregation was any indication, it was certainly an inauspicious beginning.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Warming Up



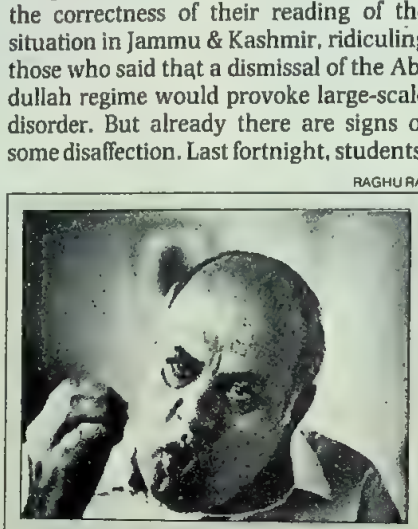
"IT IS a battle to the finish. We are going to agitate, we are going to intensify our agitation." If former chief minister Farooq Abdullah's usual ebullience wasn't getting the better of him, then it was evident that the man ousted by brother-in-law Ghulam Mohammad Shah in a Congress (I)-aided coup had returned from watching the triumphant restoration of another deposed chief minister in Hyderabad in a fighting mood.

Abdullah came back to Srinagar and immersed himself in a pre-planned round of public meetings in the Jammu area. He has, in fact, been on the move ever since his dismissal from office addressing a vast array of meetings, each one more impressive than the last. He alone of all Jammu & Kashmir politicians has been able to hold meetings in Srinagar, and his assemblies elsewhere have been far more impressive than anybody else's. But it is ironic that he should have been in Hyderabad when his own party executive had been called to finalise a decision on combining with other like-minded parties in the state in a joint front to fight for "the restoration of democracy". For, with Abdullah away the National Conference (NC) was hardly in a position to take a decision. Indeed, amidst the confusion it was evident that a powerful wing of the party favoured having no truck with any other groupings in the justifiable belief that the NC is strong enough to fight its battles on its own.

The four-party front, to be composed of Abdullah's NC, the Awami Action Party of Maulvi Farooq, the People's Conference of Abdul Gani Lone and the Panthers Party of Jammu firebrand Bhim Singh, has been under discussion for all of September. Mir Qasim of the Democratic Socialist Party, at whose initiative the move was begun, believes that a broad-based front would eliminate wasteful competition among the parties opposed to the Congress (I). Says he: "What I want is that the people of the Valley and state should have a younger leadership for their movement, and Farooq and Lone are energetic and active."

A low-key protest has, in fact, been organised since early September by Lone's People's Conference but it is, as Lone says: "A symbolic protest to keep alive the issue, focus on the unconstitutional nature of the Assembly and demand the removal of the governor." And Abdullah's supporters say that it is to his credit that he has not used his undeniable mass popularity to whip up a frenzy. Such protests as there were, have been spontaneous. By rapidly moving in and imposing local curfew at the first sign of trouble—thus earning Shah the sobriquet of 'Curfew CM'—the Government has contained trouble with one or two notable exceptions. Indeed, Congressmen point to this as evidence of the correctness of their reading of the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, ridiculing those who said that a dismissal of the Abdullah regime would provoke large-scale disorder. But already there are signs of some disaffection. Last fortnight, students in Srinagar took to the streets demanding that exams scheduled for October be postponed to March because in the less than three months that the Shah Government has been in office, educational institutions have been shut for a good two months in all.

RAGHU RAI



Abdullah is faced with the one problem that NTR did not have. He is undeniably short of a majority. His options consequently are limited.

More to the point, whether or not the alliance works out and Abdullah feels motivated enough to move for confrontation, there could be turmoil in the Valley. Shah has already made it plain that he will meet the threat head on: addressing his first press conference as chief minister, Shah last fortnight accused Abdullah of making inflammatory speeches and hinted that he would not hesitate to arrest him if the situation warranted.

However much comfort Rama Rao's return to power may be, Abdullah is faced with the one problem that the Andhra Pradesh chief minister did not have: Rama Rao was able to husband his strength; Abdullah is short of a majority however unfairly he was deprived of it. His options, consequently, are limited. They are:

- ▶ try and win back those MLA's who left him for Shah;
- ▶ whip up an agitation that is so successful that the Government resigns, leading to Governor's rule and fresh elections in six months (rather than in 1989 as presently scheduled) which he could win; or
- ▶ mark time till the Shah-Congress(I) combine breaks down under its own contradictions or the Lok Sabha poll which could see a weakened Mrs Gandhi or an opposition coalition in power.

None of these offers immediate hope. Shah took the trouble to make ministers of all his legislative party members and they are unlikely to be tempted to return to the Abdullah camp. Indeed, it is an open secret in Srinagar that some of them are keener to join the Congress (I) but have been strictly told off for the moment. One reason, is that any switch in parties would invite trouble under the state's anti-defection law. Another is that for the moment, the Congress (I) is keen to have Shah run the administration so that popular disquiet focuses on him rather than the Congress(I).

This is the reason the Centre turned down Governor Jagmohan's reported plea for Governor's rule and opted for a Congress (I)-supported government headed by Shah. The logic still prevails, and in spite of tensions between the two—Shah's NC faction and the Congress (I)—there is no likelihood that the two will break up quickly. Congressmen, long denied any access to government machinery during Sheikh Abdullah's term have been active in intervening in government decisions. Shah, who has among others transferred all the deputy commissioners and superintendents of police in the state's 13 districts and a good chunk of secretaries to the Government, omitted to consult his new-found partners in the Assembly. There has, consequently, been some heartburn and both Shah and Congress chief Mufti Mohammad Syed have travelled to Delhi to talk to Mrs Gandhi to sort things out.

"We are in no hurry," says Mufti adding that his party is not interested in attracting any further defections from Abdullah's party and that its focus at the moment is to see that Shah's Government survives. Former Central minister Mohammad Shafi Qureshi, who like the Mufti would be a candidate for chief ministership in the event of a Congress (I) ministry being formed, is more direct: "If

the Congress (I) gets impatient, they will destroy themselves. They shouldn't give the impression that Shah is a puppet."

One concrete manifestation of the two groups not getting along has been the delay in holding elections to the eight council seats that fell vacant on September 15. According to the formula that operates, the Shah-Congress (I) combine would win half these seats with the rest going to the Abdullah group, but the vacancies continue because the two have yet to agree on whom to field. Council membership bestows no real power and few benefits other than the perquisites of office: salary, home, car. They are usually rewards given to favoured party workers, but they do not necessarily have to be sinecures. After all, both Shah and his Deputy Chief Minister, D. D. Thakur are Council members not MLA's.

Shah's problem at the moment is not the Congress(I) so much as the state's economy. It's biggest revenue earner, tourism, is in the doldrums and the few sops offered can obviously make little impact. The figures tell a sorry story. With some 90 per cent of tourist arrivals by road, the Punjab troubles as well as the turmoil in the state have persuaded more than half the would-be visitors to stay at home. The Kashmir Valley was visited by more than 6 lakh domestic and 43,000 foreign tourists in 1982, a peak year. Last year, the number of Indian visitors dropped to below 4 lakh. This year, starting June, there was a complete slump and tourism officials say that the state will be lucky if it manages to get 2.75 lakh Indian visitors (and some 50,000 foreigners).

A study that is soon to be published shows that at its peak, tourism earned the state Rs 100 crore in direct revenue. Tourism, the study says, has a multiplier effect of 3.2, which means that some Rs 320 crore of earning was generated in the Valley from tourism. By comparison, the state's total development plan outlay for 1984-85 is Rs 235 crore.

The other problem that is making itself felt is the not-so-quiet resurgence of anti-Indian feeling. Expression of this has become more overt. August 14, which is Pakistan's Independence Day, was marked with considerably more flag-showing than is usual. One college even thought fit to hold a proper parade and flag hoisting ceremony. August 15, similarly, was marked with more protest than is usual, and on other occasions—such as in Baramulla where a youth died in military custody—sloganeering is loud and quick. Much of this is merely a form of protest at the treatment of the state by the Centre, but it gives the lie to the charge that Abdullah was soft on extremists. Shah's Government has, in fact, made it a point to say it has detained fewer people than Abdullah did. True, the administration has since the change-over rounded up large numbers of alleged Sikh extremists, most of them members of the outlawed All India Sikh Students Federation, but there is no move against alleged pro-Pakistani elements.

Abdullah dismisses fears that such extremists might try to take advantage of his struggle against his dismissal, adding that no one need be surprised at the resurgence of such elements in the wake of the murder of democracy in the state. But he knows that there is not that much time left before the winter sets in and the Government moves to Jammu in early November. And if things don't warm up now, then it is likely to be a cold winter for him, before the Lok Sabha elections herald a new political season.

—SUMAN DUBEY in Srinagar

WEST BENGAL

Public Clash



IT COULD have been business as usual in the West Bengal Assembly on August 20 when Public Works Minister Jatin Chakraborty got up to speak. But the boredom, if any, of the members seated in the House was dispelled quickly enough. For when the Revolutionary Socialist Party leader opened his mouth, incredulous fellow Left Front members heard an astonishing diatribe against a ministerial colleague, Dr Ashok Mitra, minister for finance. "How can I work if funds already sanctioned to my department are not released?" raged Chakraborty, to thunderous applause from the obviously delighted Congress(I) benches. For the Front, whose greatest strength has been its ability to present a facade of unity in times of adversity, this was a grievous blow indeed. And its timing could not have been worse: the Left Front Government has lately been desperately trying to assure the electorate that despite financial problems regarding plan programmes, its normal functioning has remained unimpaired.



What astounds members of the Left Front is the way Chakraborty got away with an unprecedented breach of discipline.

Chakraborty's grouse was that the Public Works Department (PWD) could not possibly repair roads because the Finance Department had so far released just Rs 4.4 crore against an allocation of Rs 8 crore which was measly enough in the first place. He publicly complained that contractors had refused to take up any new work unless the Rs 13 crore due to them was immediately paid up. On the face of it, his sensational public airing of the department's problems in the Assembly did help. Within two days, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu quietly convened a meeting of the PWD and finance secretaries where he immediately ordered the release of Rs 19 crore for Chakraborty's department.

But what astounds—and angers — other members of the Left Front is the way Chakraborty got away with an unprecedented breach of discipline. "A minister attacking another cabinet colleague on the floor of the House is unprecedented," remarked an annoyed Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) minister. Complaints are usually thrashed out in the privacy of cabinet or Front committee meetings. Front leaders and some CPI(M) ministers believed therefore that there was something stagey about Chakraborty's frontal attack on Finance Minister Mitra in the Assembly.

Added to this is the fact that earlier, a letter written by Chakraborty to the chief minister, which was strongly critical of both the Finance Department and the Urban Affairs Minister Prasanta Sur found its way to the press. "How else could news of his complaint letter to the chief minister have mysteriously leaked out to the press?" asked a suspicious Front leader. In the letter, Chakraborty pointed out that though the roads under the PWD are in a better condition than city roads, the Urban Affairs Department was sanctioned Rs 10 crore for maintaining just 1,100 km of them. He argued that he therefore felt justified in demanding a similar amount of money to look after the 16,000 km of roads which are under his department.

If the leak was something of a strange coincidence, far stranger was the CPI(M)'s response, or lack of it, to Chakraborty's outburst in the Assembly. Mitra, the target of attack, kept a grim silence although he is usually very quick on the draw whenever his department is under attack in the House. It was only at a hastily convened press conference on September 23, Front Chairman and CPI(M) leader Saroj Mukherjee and the chief minister jointly declared that Chakraborty had "denigrated the Left Front" and that the matter would be taken up at the next meeting of the Front committee.

But this is not the first time the maverick minister has embarrassed his own government and got out of it quite unscathed. Earlier at a Front committee meeting last February, the West Bengal Socialist Party leader Biman Mitra had confronted Chakraborty with the allegation of misappropriating at least Rs 1 crore. Apart from specific charges of corruption, Mitra had also come with documents to prove them. A subcommittee was set up to look into it, but despite Biman Mitra's efforts, nothing was done. Seven months later, the chief minister responded by saying the charges were baseless and that Mitra could quit the Front for all he cared.

Since then the minister has done just as he pleased. Intriguingly enough, the chief minister's first comments on the latest controversy were: "What can I do, he seems to enjoy a special status in the Cabinet." At one time, Basu had even hinted that Chakraborty might have been leaking secret cabinet decisions to the press. If Saroj Mukherjee's brave words on suitable action against the errant minister brought cheer to indignant Left Front members, they might do well to think before they celebrate. After all, recent history proves that like Mrs Gandhi, nothing sticks to Chakraborty.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE



The mass funeral for Mangadh victims: a powerful backlash

GUJARAT

Caste Conflict



INCREASING lawlessness in placid Gujarat and the Government's failure to even make a token appearance of trying to curb it may soon burgeon into a prime election issue in the state. The brutal killings of ten people in Mangadh last fortnight offered clear evidence of that as angry youths blocked the roads leading into the village with handcarts and put up a sign-board saying that their village was out of bounds for politicians until the murderers were apprehended. Local Congress(I) MLA's Natubhai Dabhi, Babubhai Patel and Dhanjibhai Baldia were made to beat a hasty retreat. The youths also handed over a memorandum to the district collector, G.K. Dudhani, stating that if any minister dared to come into the village, he would do so at his own risk. The Gariadhar taluka gram panchayat elections slated for October 14 have had to be postponed indefinitely as all the 159 candidates of different political parties, including the Congress(I), have withdrawn from the contest in protest against the Government's style of tackling the law and order problem in the area. Said Dalsukh Patel, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly: "The Government must accept the responsibility for this massacre."

The lawlessness issue has given a timely lever to the Opposition to lash out at the Solanki Government and is bound to arouse the people all over the state as the majority of Gujaratis are engaged in business and orderliness on the law front is vital to them.

Far worse, however, has been the caste hatred that has been generated between the prosperous Patels and the upcoming Kshatriyas in the Saurashtra region. Before Independence, the Kshatriyas were the rulers of the 200-odd princely states and owned most of the land. After Independence, they lost both the states and the land as the tillers became entitled to the land under the new land reforms. Patels who were the land-labourers benefitted and by sheer hard work, they branched out into businesses. The Kshatriyas on the other hand unable to maintain their old life-styles and the feudal outlook, had to take up jobs as drivers and constables. They refused to till the land they once owned. There have been many other instances of Kshatriyas terrorising villagers and forcing them to pay 'taxes' as all land belonged to them (INDIA TODAY, February 15, 1984).

After the Mangadh killings, the rift has widened. A sense of shock mixed with anger, fear and helplessness stalked Mangadh village last fortnight. There had been

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ample warning that the village was to be a target for an armed raid and there were already two armed policemen specially posted in the village at the residents' request for protection when the marauders struck, killing ten people. The policemen, the villagers said, were busy playing cards at the time of the incident. The carnage sent shock waves throughout the state. As all the victims were Patels and the assailants were Kshatriyas, the tragedy took on a caste colouration. The influential Patels in the area were shaken and gathered in huge numbers to attend the mass funeral of the victims. The ugly incident is likely to have far-reaching consequences as Patels constitute 22 per cent of the population in the state.

It is universally accepted that caste animosities were at the root of the carnage. On September 20, a group of about a dozen Mangadh villagers were returning home from Manvilas. Midway, at Timba, a group of seven armed men suddenly pounced on them. As a bullet blew up the tyre of the tractor on which they were riding, everyone tried to run for cover but the killers gunned down Odhavji Patel, Jairam Patel and Diwaliben Patel. The gunmen then ran to a nearby farm where Patel farmers were at work and shot down three of them. They then entered Mangadh and gunned down a few more Patels before making their way back to Chomal. Pointed out Pragjibhai Patel, 49, one of the injured: "The moment the tractor was stopped, we knew that there would be bloodshed. The armed men were Kshatriyas from Chomal village."

By fortnight-end, there were indications that hostility between the two communities would only increase. The elders are making some effort to bring about a rapprochement. At Chomal where the Kshatriyas predominate, Sarpanch Becharbhai Gohil said: "This cannot go on. A time has now come when we will have to sit down and swear to maintain peace. Our children should not grow up in an atmosphere where revenge reigns supreme." But the youth are in no such mood. While pinpointing the increasing lawlessness in the state Bharatiya Janata Party leader Ashok Bhatt told the massive funeral meeting at Mangadh that if the Government could not provide police protection to the villagers of Saurashtra, a parallel police force of youths would have to be formed. With issues getting into sharper focus, the caste conflict may well have repercussions that could in the coming months spell bad news for the Madhavsinh Solanki Ministry in the polls.

—RAMESH MENON in Mangadh

BOMBAY

Loan Blitz

IT IS a battle between two high-profile Bombay citizens, Rusi Karanjia the dapper, controversial editor-owner of the *Blitz* weekly and the *Daily* newspaper, and the tubby Yusuf Patel, one-time COFEPOSA detenu and now a big-time builder, who insists he was never in the smuggling business as reported in the press.

The present, somewhat dangerous fracas between the two personalities revolves round a Rs 1.5 lakh loan made out in favour of Karanjia on June 12, 1982, with a registered letter explaining that the amount was a personal interest-free loan for six months. The matter had been forgotten for two years until suddenly on August 8, 1984, Patel demanded his money back. On August 21, 1984, the *Blitz* chief accountant-cum-secretary returned a cheque for Rs 1.5 lakh. The question of repayment of interest has still not been settled between the two parties.

The cheque, the letters and a meeting between Patel, Karanjia and his son-in-law Karl Mehta, deputy general manager of the *Blitz*, at Karanjia's residence on May 15, 1982, are all a matter of record. The controversy however, is over the differing explanation for the odd loan. Karanjia claims that the money was one of several loans arranged by the then Congress(I) leader Rajni Patel for his tablold newspaper started early in 1981. Patel says: "He is unnecessarily dragging in Rajni Patel. Rajnibhai was not present at the tea-party when the Rs 1.5 lakh was asked for. Rajnibhai's request for a loan for the *Daily* came much earlier."

According to Patel the cheque he wrote out was a private settlement between him and Karanjia after the *Blitz* carried a defamatory article headlined "Menace of the Smuggler Builder" on November 21, 1981, against him. After the meeting and the handing over of the cheque, stories against Patel stopped appearing till this year when Patel declined further loans. Then a series of articles about Patel's company's controversial involvement in the FSI scandal surfaced in the *Daily*.

Karanjia, furious at the city evening *Free Press Bulletin* carrying a lead story on Patel's allegations, hit back with a lead story in his morning tabloid *Daily* headlined, "Who Blackmails Whom"? The story went on to state: "The reference to an alleged demand of Rs 1.5 lakh from Yusuf Patel is a totally false concoction to cover the exposure by the *Daily* of Yusuf Patel's involvement in the FSI scandal now being investigated by the Anti-corruption Bureau." Karanjia who is normally at the receiving end of countless defamation suits announced that he was filing criminal and civil cases against Patel and the Free Press group of newspapers, which he alleged was irked about a recent story in the *Blitz* against its Managing Director J.K. Karnani.



Yusuf Patel

The fracas between Karanjia and Patel revolves round a six-month interest-free loan of Rs 1.5 lakh given to Karanjia in 1982.



Rusi Karanjia

A confident Patel retorted: "I welcome the suit. That would be the correct form and it would teach Karanjia a lesson he hasn't met so far." Publisher of the Free Press group G.L. Lakotia said Karanjia was welcome to sue. "We have checked out facts," he added. Meanwhile, Karnani was sending notices for a Rs 2 crore civil suit against Karanjia for the *Blitz* story, implying a nexus between Karnani and State Bank Managing Chairman, A.S. Puri as well as criminal defamation suits on behalf of his companies for the same story.

Why Patel should remember his loan after such a long interval is just one of the intriguing pieces in the puzzle that has intrigued all of Bombay.

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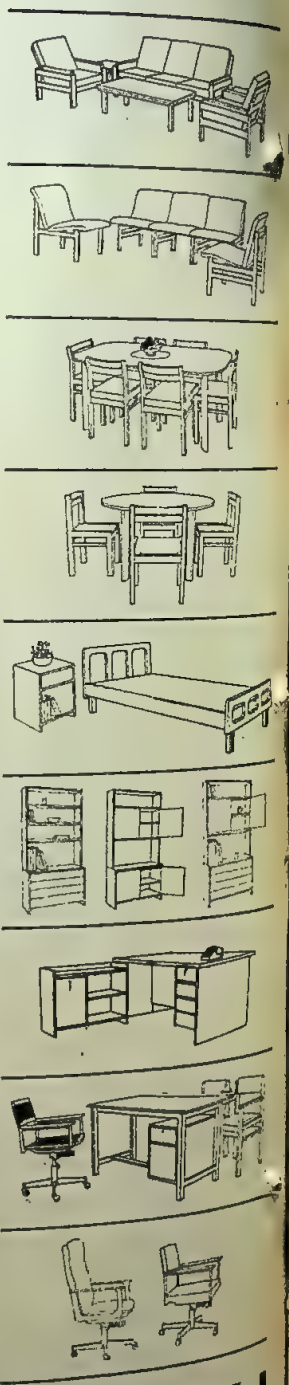
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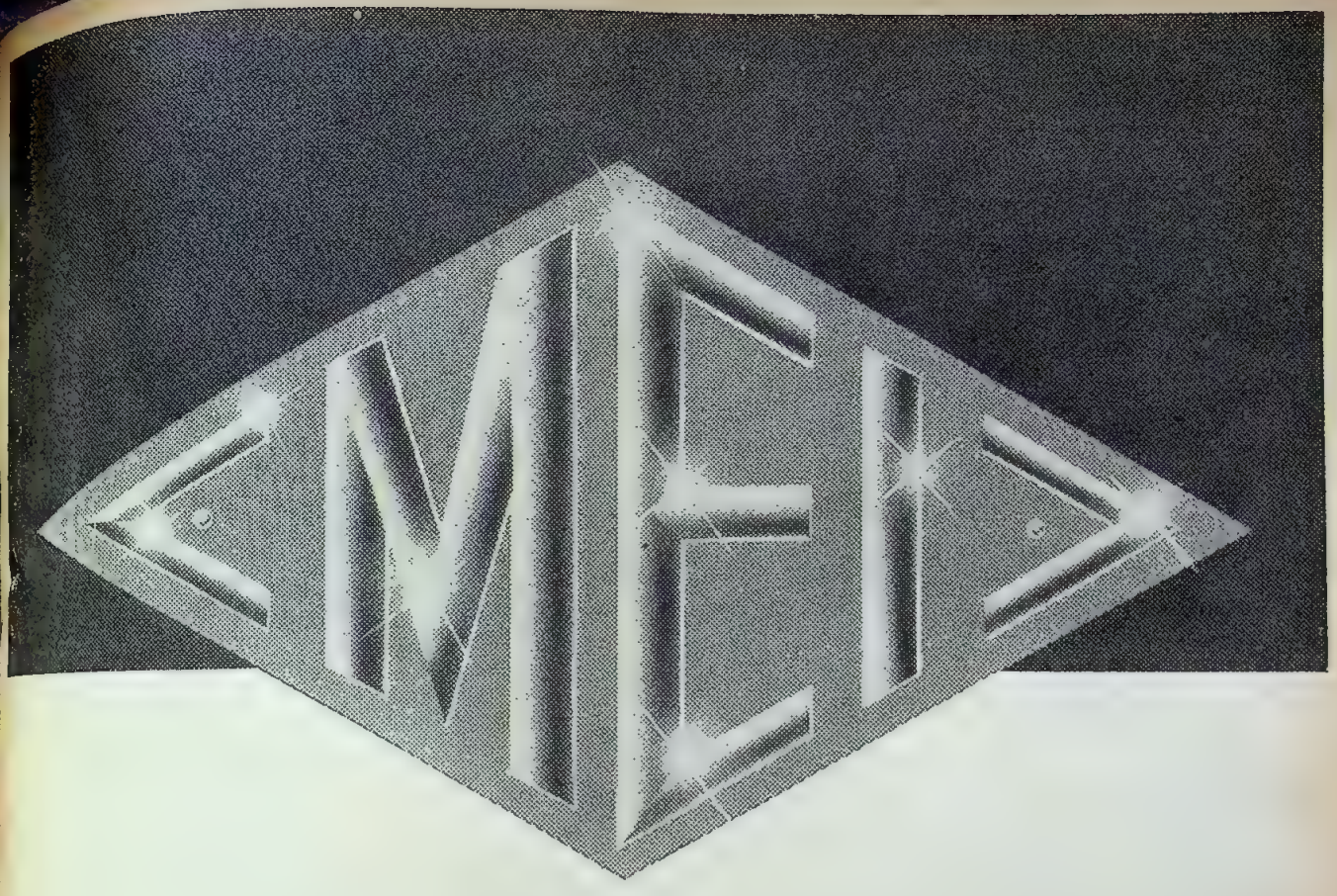
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HIMACHAL PRADESH

Ouster Problem



THE CONGRESS(I) in Himachal Pradesh could not have done more for opposition unity. For 19 months now, the divided opposition parties in the state have been trying in vain to find a credible issue to attack Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh and his ruling party on. Last fortnight, the Congress(I) practically handed it to them on a platter when it ham-handedly ousted the speaker of the Assembly, Thakur Sen Negi. Negi's



"Let them give one example of my partisan behaviour."

THAKUR SEN NEGI
former speaker

fine reputation for integrity and impartiality in the House and the awkward way he was hustled out of office both united the Opposition and galvanised it into action. "Negi had made a name for himself as an impartial presiding officer. His removal smacks of an evil design to impose a totally partisan speaker. We will fight it out," said a determined Shanta Kumar, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

Negi was unseated when a Congress(I)-sponsored no-confidence motion was adopted, with all the 36 party MLA's voting for it and the 29 opposition MLA's against it. The resolution sought the 75-year-old bureaucrat-turned-politician's removal on the grounds of "partial conduct, inability to maintain law and order, and not conducting the business of the houses in accordance with the rules". During the debate however, none of the Congressmen could substantiate their allegations. Said Negi: "Let them give one example of my partisan behaviour. I was elected as an independent member and it was my duty to keep the high traditions of the office I was occupying."

Evidently, the issue did not enthuse all the Congress(I) legislators—only six spoke against Negi in the Congress(I) Legislature Party meeting. Older partymen favoured a rapproachement, and Negi's popularity and unblemished track record forced even the chief minister to keep the tirade at a low pitch. Obviously, the Congress(I) was finding it difficult to defend its hasty action against Negi who wields considerable influence, particularly in the Kinnaur region from where he has won elections four times and was actually responsible for the formation of a Congress(I) Government in the state in 1980 and 1982 when his crucial vote gave the party a wafer-thin majority. Besides, neither has he been tarnished by any political or financial scandal in his 30 years as a government servant and later as a minister in Thakur Lal's cabinet in 1980.

What made him unpopular with the ruling party was the fact that he refused to join the party. Negi disclosed that he had even been offered a ministership which he declined. Negi's squeaky clean image might have served to give a sheen of respectability to the Cabinet, a majority of whose members have allegations of corruption against them. Far from joining up, Negi annoyed a section of the ruling party when he insisted that all MLA's who had been appointed chairmen of state corporations vacate their legislative residences or pay rents at the commercial rates because their new appointments entitled them to a residence as well. He also foiled the attempt of some Congress(I) MLA's to represent the state in some legislative conferences abroad. And he refused to conduct House proceedings in a manner calculated to please the ruling party.

The chief minister was forced to sack Negi because of his own tenuous position. With a dozen MLA's of doubtful loyalty within his party, and a majority of only six in the 68-member Assembly, he had to tread carefully. But ironically, his cautious decision to let Negi go may have made his position even more insecure. Negi's strong links with the Congress(I) have won him the sympathy of at least half a dozen MLA's who are upset over the ouster even if they perforce voted for it. "Instead of consolidating our party, we have created yet another powerful enemy in the state. Like N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh, Negi will become a rallying point for opposition unity in the state," said a senior Congress(I) leader somewhat unhappily.

He was right. For the first time since the 1982 assembly elections, the Janata Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party got together to address joint public meetings protesting the "murder of democracy in Himachal Pradesh". Virbhadra Singh, one of the few Congress(I) chief ministers with an unbesmirched record, says gamely: "The speaker's subject is a very trivial issue. We have more important problems at hand to tackle." Negi, who has since joined the Opposition, might just turn out to be one of those "important problems" for the Congress(I). —PRABHU CHAWLA

HARYANA

Odd Moves



CABINET expansions have become something of a political joke, their only purpose having become the need to cater to a particular faction or an exercise in political one-upmanship. Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal, the wiliest of the breed, managed to execute both last fortnight when he added five more ministers to an already-overcrowded Cabinet. In the process, he once again bested his arch rival, former Haryana strongman Bansi Lal.

The timing, however, caught most observers by surprise. The next assembly session was six months away and there was no forseeable threat to his citadel. When he casually mentioned to some newsmen that "I shall add some more to my tribe" nobody took him seriously.

But they were ignorant of the fact that the instructions had come from on high, namely Rajiv Gandhi, who had summoned Lal to Delhi and instructed him to "close ranks" in the face of the coming elections. With F.M.Khan raising the banner of revolt, the high command was wary that Bansi Lal might follow suit, thus depriving the ruling party of the Jat vote so crucial to their plans. The strategy worked out was to accommodate as many pro-Bansi Lal dissidents as possible and further isolate the Jat leader.

The chief minister lost no time in inducting Harpal Singh , Amar Singh Dhanik, Piara Singh and Kartari Devi into the ministry. Roshan Lal was appointed chief parliamentary secretary and , a week later, former chief minister Banarsi Das Gupta was also included in the ministry, swelling the strength to 22 in a house of 90. Less than a year ago, Harpal Singh and



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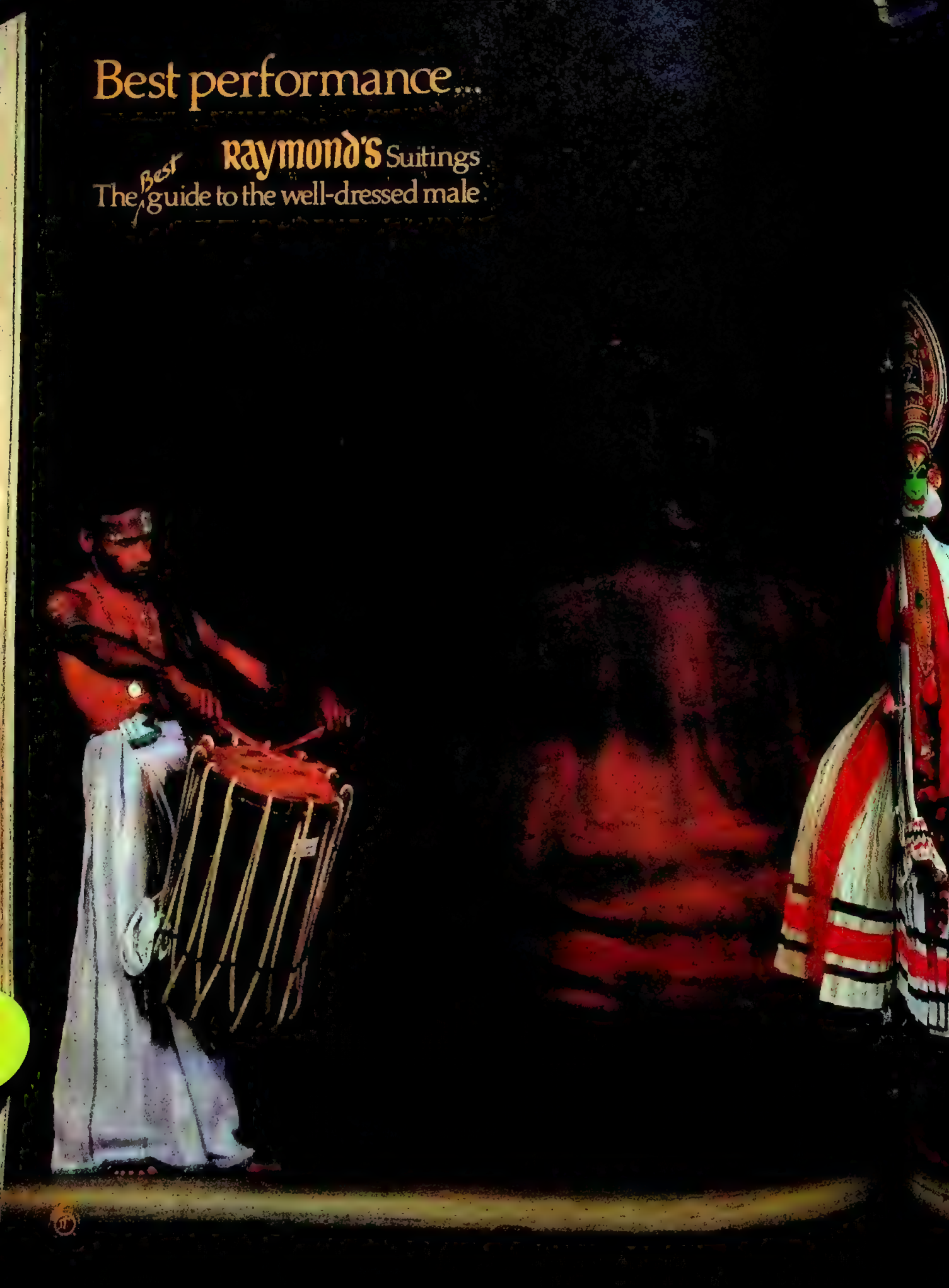
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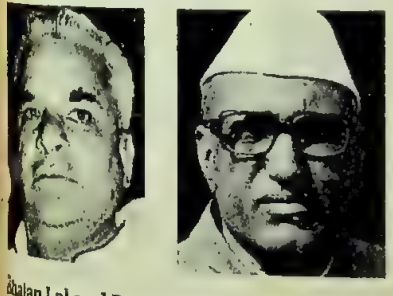
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Dhanik, both staunch Bansi Lal supporters, were among the six ministers who quit, at Bansi Lal's insistence, levelling serious charges of corruption and nepotism against the chief minister. The move effectively cut the ground from under Bansi Lal's feet, specially the induction of Gupta. Gupta, once a close ally of Bansi Lal, had fallen out with him when he joined the Janata Party. Gupta hails from Bhiwandi, Bansi Lal's constituency, and the strategy is to give him a Lok Sabha ticket for the elections from Bhiwandi where he could pose serious problems for his former ally.

That Bansi Lal was worried was soon in evidence. For the first time in seven months, he sought an audience with Mrs Gandhi accompanied by his son, Surinder Singh. At the meeting, both complained about the manoeuverings by Bhajan Lal and said it was undermining the party and encouraging groupism.

It is not clear what promises were made but some obviously were. The TV relay centre at Bhiwandi which was to be inaugurated by Information & Broadcasting Minister, H.K.L.Bhagat, will now be inaugurated by Bansi Lal. Though relatively minor, it is one sign that the party lea-



Bhajan Lal and Bansi Lal: one-upmanship

dership is keen to initiate a Bihar-type patch up between the two rivals.

But in trying to cut down Bansi Lal to size, the chief minister has also laid himself open to attack from another direction. The expansion has angered the Balmiks, the Rajputs and the Banias, powerful castes in Haryana, who have found no representation in the Cabinet so far. They have been pressing Bhajan Lal for some months now to give them representation, but with no avail. Further, the new entrants have their own enemies within the Cabinet. Piara Singh's inclusion has annoyed Assembly Speaker Tara Singh who refused to attend the oath taking ceremony. There are also others, mainly heads of state corporations, who have been promised cabinet posts but are still to be accommodated. Bhajan Lal seems unfazed but his latest action could be a case of cutting off his nose to spite his face.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

T. RAJAN POOLIYAL



(From left) Rajiv, Karunakaran, Antony and Rahim: changing fortunes

KERALA

Full Circle



AS THE Andhra Pradesh drama was drawing to a close, deeper south the only Congress(I) Chief Minister Kerala's K. Karunakaran was facing a storm of a different kind as criticism by several of his cabinet colleagues, the CPI(M) led Opposition, and even ardent supporters of the Congress(I) mounted relentlessly. The factions of Finance Minister K.M. Mani and Revenue Minister P.J. Joseph were most vociferous in their denouncement, as was the Congress(I) mouthpiece, the *Veekshana*. In a biting editorial, it condemned the ruling party's involvement in Andhra Pradesh.

All these things weighed heavily on Karunakaran's mind as he sped to the airport on September 15 to receive AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi who took time off from a whirlwind south India tour to attend a hastily arranged state-level convention of the Congress(I) at Trivandrum. He was expected not only to put Andhra Pradesh in perspective, but also to apply salve on outraged feelings and inspire confidence among the Congress(I) flock in Kerala. At the close of the visit, a beaming M.P. Gangadharan, irrigation minister close to Karunakaran, declared: "It was a morale boosting visit which saved our party from an embarrassing situation in the state."

Whether or not it actually achieved this, the visit underlined the special attention being given to new AICC(I) General Secretary A.K. Antony by the high command in Delhi. Flying into Trivandrum a little before Rajiv Gandhi, Antony stole the show from Karunakaran. This was clear from the moment greetings were exchanged: Rajiv Gandhi declined the use of a Mercedes Benz arranged by Karunakaran, opting instead for an Ambassador, and obviously patronising Antony. Later when the convention broke off for lunch, Rajiv Gandhi refused a special sumptuous meal, in order to have *thayir sadam* (curd rice) with the delegates.

Rajiv Gandhi's affairs on this trip were left to the care of Antony who, two years ago, had virtually propped up the Karunakaran ministry by lending it support. But he had since fallen into political oblivion. Confessed Home Minister Vayalar Ravi, an Antony man: "Rajiv has been fair in approaching the Antony men."

However, it was left to Karunakaran's blue-eyed boy Krishna Kumar, chairman of the public sector Hindustan Latex, to fund and arrange the convention. But Kumar, a Lok Sabha aspirant, could not summon the crowds and it was left to Ravi to organise khadi-clad policemen to fill the stadium. Still, with Mani and Joseph keeping away from the convention, Rajiv Gandhi could not meet any prominent regional party leaders, thus failing to win friends and influence people.

As for Andhra Pradesh, Rajiv Gandhi took great pains to explain the situation to partymen, making sure he justified the actions of Ram Lal in dismissing the N.T. Rama Rao ministry. While it is uncertain whether or not this message was suitably communicated, the visit served to explode the myth that Karunakaran was invincible because of his direct contact with Delhi. Further, with the proper manipulation of political and psychological strings, it was clear that the Antony camp had come full circle—what that means for Karunakaran's future is just another of the myriad problems he is suddenly faced with.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

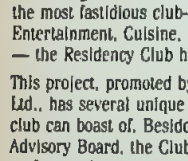
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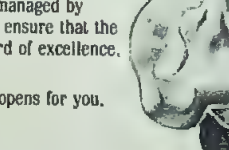
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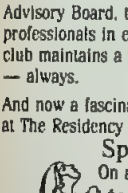
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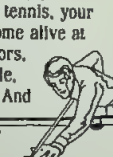


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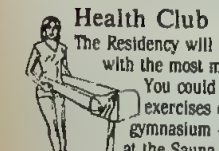
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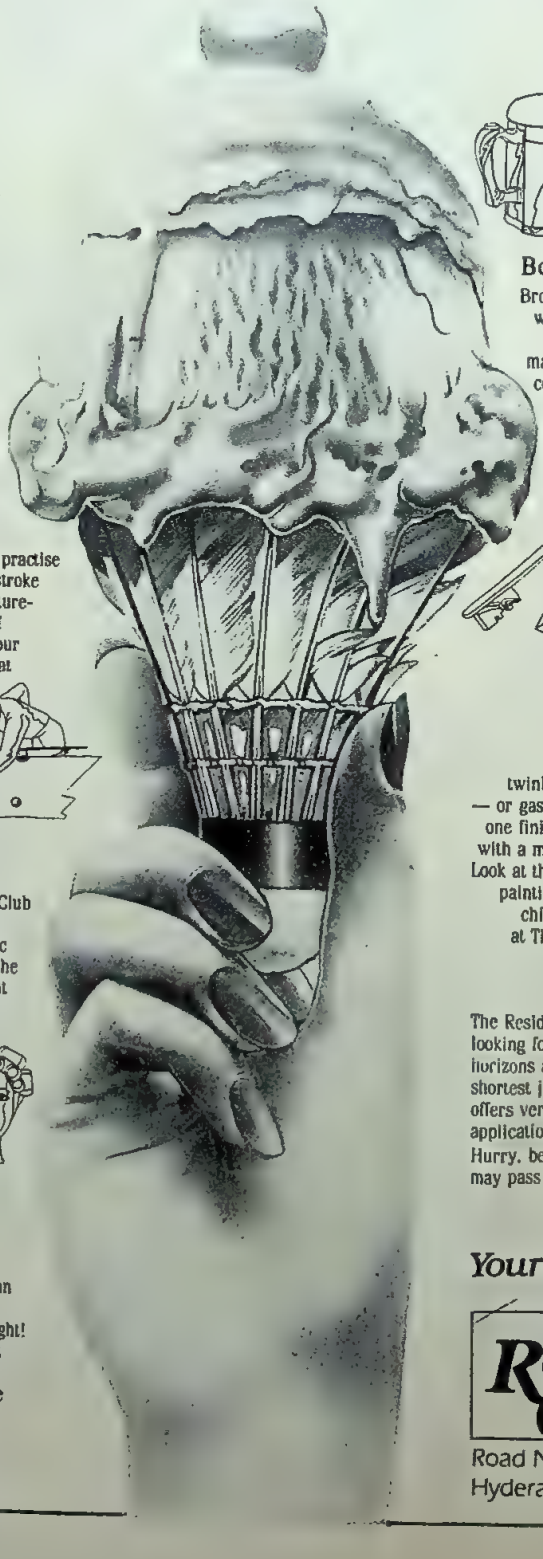


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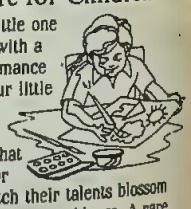


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KARNATAKA

Bankers' Woes

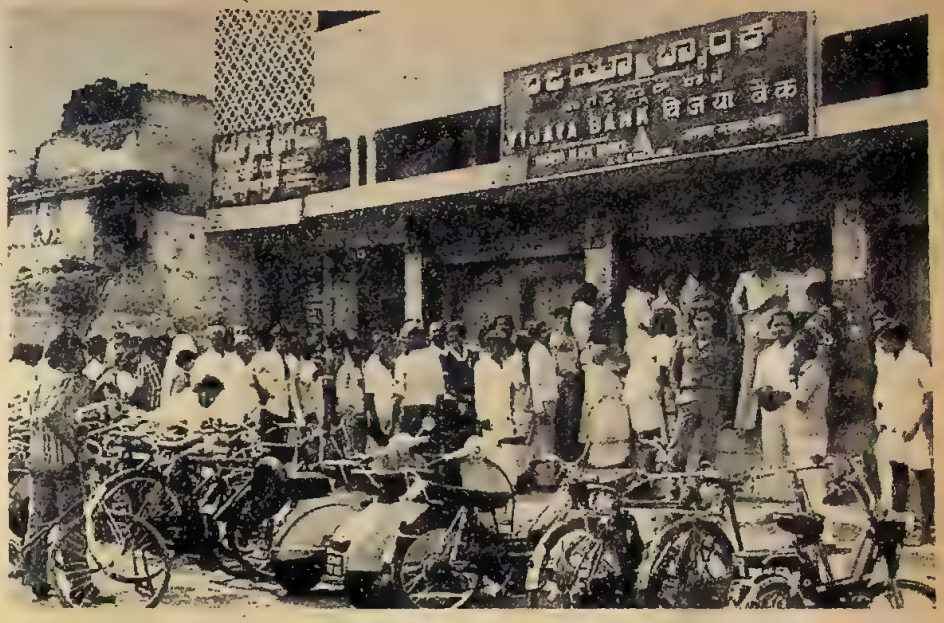


IT IS one scheme that is certainly not going to send the "deserving" laughing all the way to the bank. Last fortnight, an agitated mob of loan-seekers in Bangalore, Karnataka's buzzing capital, thronged many of the city's 464 banks, threatening and abusing bank officials, damaging parked vehicles and finally forcing the officials to pull down their shutters. Their grouse: Union Deputy Finance Minister Janardhan Poojary's controversial bank loan scheme, for the economically weak which comes under the 20-Point Programme, and was initiated in the city early last month, has misfired, not only causing confusion, but leaving the genuine needy loan-seekers in the lurch.

The fall-out of the unruly incidents all over the city banks led to the All India Confederation of Bank Officers' Organisations (AICOBOO) decision to stop distribution of all loans, until adequate protection was provided and the loan-seekers were removed of their misconceptions about the terms of the loans. Caught between politicking and electioneering, the loan-seekers were unaware of the terms when they accosted bank managers demanding their share. Some misconceptions were:

- loans up to Rs 5,000 are given against ration cards for all with annual incomes less than Rs 3,000;
- loans up to Rs 1,500 need never be repaid by the loanees;
- loan disbursal would end by September 20, the day on which the last of the three melas scheduled for Bangalore (later postponed) would end;
- Mrs Indira Gandhi sanctioned Rs 10 crore to be distributed in Bangalore as loans. (Mrs Gandhi during her visit to Bangalore last month had sanctioned Rs 10 crore for drought relief);
- if Mrs Gandhi comes back to power, the loans will be waived.

Countering these wrong notions has been a formidable task for the bank officials who have promptly laid the whole blame at Poojary's doorstep. Poojary's advice to the poor about the conditions of the loan never reached them. What has strengthened the case of the warring loan-seekers is the all important role of the ration card. Following Poojary's instructions that banks should not insist on security before giving out loans bank officials came up with the idea of using ration cards to ensure identification.



Queueing up for the loans: total chaos

The confusion was confounded when a circular was sent off requesting bank managers to "fix the branch's seal on ration cards to prevent multiple financing". A subsequent decision required that branches should insist not only on stamped ration cards but passport size photographs of intending beneficiaries. Amid conflicting instructions and their anxiety to fill up the initial quota of 50 loans from each branch for the mela, banks enforced the stamping of all ration cards. Most branches, however, exceeded the initial quota. As against a quota of 900 applications, Syndicate Bank's 18 branches had distributed to 1,981 applicants loans worth Rs 65.69 lakh. But the idea spread that loans would be granted up to Rs 5,000 upon production of ration cards.

Applicants promptly made xerox copies of their ration cards and attached them with their applications, spending on an average Rs 10. Kandaswamy, a waste-paper vendor of Wilson Garden armed with an application form for Rs 3,000 with a recommendation seal of the Congress(I) corporator met with no luck while trying to secure his loan. Said he: "I spent Rs 15 for all this. Even if I get Rs 1,000 it will be enough." Grieved Sarojamma, a seeker of a silk production loan: "I have spent the Rs 45 meant for purchasing rations in order to get the form ready. Now the bank manager refuses to give the money."

At the other side of the fence, more confusion prevailed. A staggering 87,180 bogus ration cards were detected in the city during the last fortnight. The obvious inference was that loans were going to the undeserving. Said AICOBOO state Chairman C. Gopinathan Nair: "All along banks have been giving loans for the economically weak. Now thanks to the politicking and the mad rush, even the really needy are going to be denied help for the time being." Added an agitated AICOBOO Secretary P.S. Rajagopal: "To weed out applications being submitted with bogus addresses, it was prescribed that applicants should produce ration cards along with loan applications. But the scheme degenerated into a card loan scheme with vote brokers taking the opportunity as godsend to secure loans."

Although Poojary promised the distribution of loans worth Rs 3 crore to only 11,349 applicants, the number was far in excess of the 10,350 loans targeted as the quota for 207 branches in Bangalore for the first mela. In addition, out of over 7,000 applications which poured into banks, following the mela, hardly 300 have received aid. Said Syndicate Bank Officers' Association member P. Ketilaya: "Privately they (the loan-seekers) agree that the money is for tiding over family expenses or repaying old loans."

Meanwhile, protest surfaced among bank employees. Most complained that they were betrayed and the mess was primarily because the top brass in banks were kowtowing Poojary's line in order to secure promotions. Said Syndicate Bank Staff Union's Deputy General Secretary U.S.A. Nayak: "For the executives' personal gain, so many people had to suffer."

With the infamous loan melas inviting more wrath and anger from all quarters, and the rot that has set in the banking system, the problem of stemming it is likely to be a titanic task. —K. BHANUMATHI

PUNJAB

A Glimmer of Hope

FOR PRESIDENT Zail Singh, it was a belated if gratifying pilgrimage. Last week as he completed the perambulation of the marble *parikrama* of the Golden Temple—barefoot and amid tight security—he paused to make a highly emotional speech outside the splendidly restored Akal Takht. "The last time I came here," he said, "I found it hard to control my tears. Today, I stand here to promise all that I will continue to work for goodwill among all communities." Pointing to the glittering, gold-plated dome of the Akal Takht he spoke of its new-found grandeur. If ever there was a symbol of hope to the intractable Punjab crisis, it lay in this edifice, the centre-piece of the hectic repair work in the Golden Temple complex that has removed virtually every trace of the vicious battle fought for its control a mere four months ago.

The symbolism of the presidential visit last fortnight was self-evident. He was last at the scene two days after Operation Bluestar, amid the wreckage and putrefying debris of the army action. Now, he sealed that gory, fractious chapter of political history by claiming that "most of the hurdles between the priests and the Government have been removed. Whatever problems are left will be sorted out by the Punjab governor, his advisers and the head priests".

BHAWAN SINGH



Zail Singh's symbolic visit to the Golden Temple came close on the heels of the Government's decision announced by the prime minister on September 25 to clear the Temple of the army and its handing over the gurudwara to the SGPC, a move unanimously welcomed by the head priests, the Akalis, and opposition leaders as a healthy change of heart from the insensitive hard line in the immediate aftermath of Operation Bluestar. Said Mrs Gandhi: "Now that the repairs are complete even the token presence of the army in the Golden Temple can be withdrawn. This we have decided to do." For Mrs Gandhi, her image recently tarred by the murky Andhra Pradesh episode, it was as much a matter of expediency as an inevitable culmination to a process that started with the foisting of Baba Santa Singh to organise *kar sewa* for the repair of the Temple complex. Santa Singh has been more or less unceremoniously dropped from the scene, having fulfilled his role, and there is an orchestrated chorus of approval from the Congress (I). But, the Government's initiatives were welcomed in other quarters as well. "The agreement... marks a landmark that will be hailed countrywide and with particular thanksgiving by the Sikh community," editorialised the *Indian Express* in a generous appraisal of Mrs Gandhi's broadcast and decision. Added *The Times of India:* "In the process, she has disposed of the ridiculous theory that in dealing with the situation in Punjab for the last three years, she has been guided primarily by the consideration of winning the Hindu vote."

Clearly, the Government's move to restore normalcy in Punjab is in no small way linked to the upcoming election in the country, with the need to retrieve ground lost in the Andhra debacle, to stand once again on the firm advantage awarded to her by the crackdown on terrorists. The arithmetic of the elections is undeniable: with the prospects, at the moment, far from certain, every seat counts and the 13

Zail Singh being taken around the restored Akal Takht last week (left) and the damaged Akal Takht after the army action: constructive moves

RAGHU RAI



seats of Punjab must seem an attractive proposition.

But if the move to restore normalcy is to be carried to its logical conclusion, if only in electoral terms, then the handing over of the Temple is merely a first step, and will be regarded as a breakthrough only if it is followed up by other, long awaited steps. The army is still out in Punjab and its presence evokes a certain amount of ill-will in the Sikh community. The Disturbed Areas Act is still in force and gives the authorities arbitrary powers. There are still Sikh terrorists who occasionally strike at selected targets, climaxing in the grim slaughter of eight bus passengers near the village of Naushera in Gurdaspur district on September 7. And there is strong evidence that Sikh extremists continue to make their pilgrimage to Pakistan for training and sustenance.

SMALL wonder, then, that the Government's initiative should have been welcomed, but cautiously by the head priests of the Golden Temple. While they expressed gratitude for handing the complex over to the SGPC, the priests were critical of the army's role in Punjab in the last two months threatening to raise last-minute hitches in the transfer and withdrawal process, and laid down stiff conditions for the restoration of normalcy in the state. That everything was still far from settled was evident from the statement made by Kripal Singh, jathedar of the Akal Takht, who made a statement in Zail Singh's presence saying: "If the Government continues its anti-Sikh attitude and treats us like second class citizens, it will not only endanger the unity of the country, but also cause communal disharmony." Kripal Singh enumerated the conditions which were:

- the immediate revocation of the ban on the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF);
- the unconditional release of all AISSF activists and Akali leaders detained in Punjab and other states;
- an end to the arrest of Sikh youth in Punjab and other states; and
- sufficient compensation to the families of those hurt in the army action.

The priests made it clear that these conditions were necessary to assuage the sentiments of the Sikhs and had nothing to do with the political demands. But the priests were realistic enough to make out the gain already achieved as a plus point for them. Said the jathedar of Anandpur Sahib, Harcharan Singh Mahalon: "Ultimately, it is our victory. We have been handed over the entire complex without any bloodshed. If the entire Sikh community remains united, both the SGPC and the Akali Dal will win this war."

There were no easy answers to the priests' demands. They are allied to the restoration of normalcy in Punjab, without which the glimmer of hope offered by the hand-over of the Temple will be quickly extinguished. Central to this is how, and when, will a popular government be restored to the state, and what will be the course of the Government in dealing with the frontline Akali leadership, presently in jail. While the area of disagreement between the Akalis and the Government, as outlined in the 44-point charter of Akali demands, has momentarily narrowed, the old disputed questions of water, Chandigarh and Punjabi-speaking territories which formed the backbone of the long drawn out agitation remain unanswered. The feeling is summed up by former Congress(I) MP Amarinder Singh, who says: "Right now all we want is our gurudwaras back, and nothing else."



The five head priests emerging from Harmandir Sahib to meet Zail Singh

Such a reaction is characteristic in view of the fact that no immediate strategy exists among Akalis, there being no Akali leadership to take a stand. Last week, when the attorney-general announced before the Supreme Court that the Government was "seriously considering" the release of Akali Dal President and morcha dictator Harchand Singh Longowal, former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal and SGPC president Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the news went unnoticed in the euphoria over the Government's hand-over of the Golden Temple complex. But its effect is central to a solution in Punjab.

The courtship that led to these events took place in secret, undisclosed places in New Delhi and Punjab through most of September. For both sides, the Central Government and the Akalis, it didn't pay to advertise. Adversaries of four traumatic years, they had to protect themselves from any possible social, political and religious fall-out from their new, conciliatory mood. If the Centre balked at the thought of appearing weak, the Akalis too were determined to wrest as many concessions from the Government as possible to restore their credibility among fellow Sikhs.

BHAWAN SINGH



Yet, despite the pervading secrecy, it was evident last fortnight that some understanding was finally being reached on key, immediate issues. The area of disagreement had, for the moment, been narrowed to just one: the fate of the Golden Temple complex. The Centre had earlier decided to avoid any kind of confrontation. The prime minister, mobilising a galaxy of senior politicians and bureaucrats for the negotiations in the first half of September, told them to take care to tread softly on this very sensitive issue. Finally, making a short notice nation-wide broadcast on the night of September 25, Mrs Gandhi said: "The Government does not want to retain control of the Temple. We are willing to hand it over soon to legitimate religious authorities, but it is certainly the Government's concern that whosoever looks after its management should ensure that it would not be misused."

IN HER address—exactly 114 days after an equally momentous broadcast to the nation which presaged Operation Bluestar—the prime minister once again defended the army action. "The nation's sole concern is that places of worship should not become centres of secessionist, terrorist and other anti-national and anti-social activities," she said. The decision to withdraw the army came after the five head priests on September 18 reiterated their opposition to the continuation of the army's presence in the Golden Temple. That there was some communication between the priests and the Government was clear as long as one month ago when the World Sikh Convention on September 1 and 2 gave the Government a one month deadline to remove the army from the complex. The one month was significant: that was just the time the Government needed to complete all the repairs to the damaged Akal Takht.

It was no coincidence that the high priests had called for a protest march on the Golden Temple for October 1—which has since been called off—and which evoked such enormous response. All through September, the priests had been exhorting Sikhs to participate in the "holy march" and both state and central intelligence agencies were worried about the possible threat to law and order that might ensue. Thus, Home Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao held a series of meetings with Punjab Governor K. T. Satarawala as well as Congress (I) MLA's and senior bureaucrats to canvass advice and views. Soon after, the cabinet committee on political affairs, comprising Mrs Gandhi, Rao

THE PRESIDENT

Lead Role

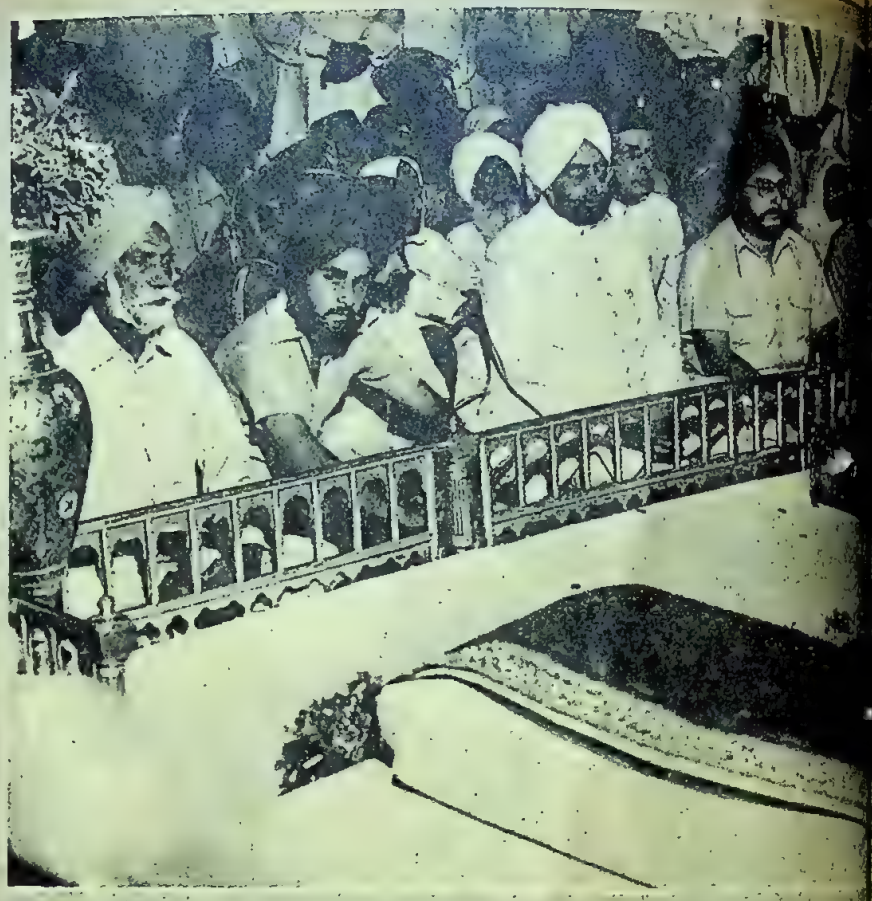
FEW PEOPLE would have envied the President of India. For the past few months Giani Zail Singh had been under severe pressure, being torn between two contradictory, but equally crucial obligations: his duty as supreme head of the state, and his obedience to the Khalsa Panth. But by last week, when the army withdrew from the Golden Temple, it became clear that the President had managed to fulfil both obligations most adroitly. Overnight, after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's dramatic address to the nation on September 25, the Sikh head priests made an equally dramatic statement: they exonerated Zail Singh, whom they had only 24 days before condemned as *tankhaiya* guilty of religious misconduct.

For the President, the verdict came as a big relief and he reciprocated the gesture with a flying visit to the Golden Temple a day later. During his two-hour stay there he conferred with the priests for 50 minutes, addressed a gathering for 20 minutes, and offered prayers inside Harmandir Sahib.

It was not an ordinary visit by any means. The pilgrimage—his second since the army action—was the culmination of behind-the-scenes moves aimed at saving the President from social reprisals at the hands of the Sikh community for his alleged connivance with Operation Bluestar. Though he was able to effectively counter the allegations, it was not without appeasing the extremists in the Akali Dal. Reiterating that as constitutional head of the state he had no direct role to play, he nevertheless expressed sorrow at what had happened in the Temple. Standing below the Akal Takht, Zail Singh said in a choked voice, "I ask for sincere forgiveness from the gurus for the unfortunate incidents." For the priests, this meant an apology on behalf of the Government and they were willing to make more concessions.

However, a section of the Akali Dal and student leaders condemned the priests for sparing the President. Nearly 100 Sikh youths shouted anti-Zail Singh slogans outside the Golden Temple while the President was making a speech inside. Said a Sikh leader, "Who are these priests to reverse a decision taken by an entire sangat in September? The decision to nerate the President was a gross violation of Sikh traditions."

Still, the exoneration was a reward—



Zail Singh offering prayers at the Golden Temple: redeeming faith

one hard won. Rather than take the back seat as the titular head of the state, the President participated actively in the Government's efforts to find a solution for the vexing problem of Punjab. If for obvious reasons he could not himself meet the head priests, he sent his emissaries—an Amritsar-based industrialist, a former Punjab government servant now serving in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and a retired army official—as many as four times to Amritsar and Chandigarh to talk to the priests on his behalf. Last week presidential aides even talked to the ailing Atma Singh, senior vice-president, SGPC now detained under the National Security Act, at his hospital bed in Amritsar.

The President's men also sent feelers to Gurcharan Singh Tohra, chief of the SGPC, former Punjab chief minister Prakash Singh Badal and Akali Dal president Harchand Singh Longowal. "Gianiji was genuinely concerned about the Punjab problem and he wanted to be kept informed by both private and government sources about the latest developments," explained a Rashtrapati Bhavan official. Accordingly, even on routine visits to the capital, senior Punjab government officials including the governor made it a point to call on the President. Zail Singh did not shrink from making specific suggestions during these talks—despite the fact that just a week ago, his son-in-law died of cerebral malaria. All along, his one question was: *"Tussi ki sochiya? As tran kadon taq chalega?"* (What do you think? How long will it continue?).

Singh decided to intervene early last month following pressure from followers both in the Akali Dal and the Congress(I). According to Home Ministry sources, his intervention was sought because moves initiated by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Buta Singh and Arun Singh, a close confidant of AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi had not yielded results. Worried about the possible implications of the proposed October 1 march, Singh summoned Mrs Gandhi and advised her to give up the confrontationist approach. A desperate Mrs Gandhi, licking her wounds after the Andhra episode, requested Singh to take the initiative. Immediately Atma Singh, former cabinet minister in the Akali government and respected both by the SGPC and the Akali leadership was transferred from jail to a hospital and five meetings arranged be-

BHAWAN SINGH



tween him and the head priests. Following week-long negotiations in which state government officials also participated, a plan was worked out involving the complete withdrawal of the army from the Temple and the phased release of Akali leaders.

On the occasion of his earlier visit to the Temple too, Zail Singh had brushed aside constitutional niceties when just two days after army action, he flew down to Amritsar without consulting either the prime minister or the then home minister P.C. Sethi. Later, though he justified the action, he simultaneously admonished the state Government for its failure to prevent the entry of arms into the Golden Temple.

But his efforts were also because as a Sikh he had a personal stake in the resolution of the problem. Being declared *tankhaiya* by the head priests—whose word in the community is law—the President faced the harrowing prospect of being excommunicated by the Sikhs. While he labours to live up to the people's expectations of a President, the Akalis tried to force him to prove his Sikh bona fides. Last week Zail Singh effectively managed to do both.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Amritsar

and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, held a marathon 160-minute session with other advisers who were present to finalise the decision.

In one sense, the Government had no plausible reason to keep a hold on the Temple any longer. Work on the Akal Takht was nearing completion. In the past 14 weeks, over 600 workmen—from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), the state PWD, the National Museum, the National Archives—joined by artisans from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh had been deployed to restore to their original shape the Akal Takht and other buildings of the complex which had been damaged during the June battle.

On hand was the stocky Nihang leader, Baba Santa Singh with his 150 followers, brought in to give religious sanction to the repair work. The whole job when done will run up a bill of Rs 10 crore, including the cost of 40 kg of gold donated by the Centre and state governments as well as leading industrialists in India and abroad. The nature of the work was such that nobody other than the Government would have been able to put it together in the short time that it has taken.

EVEN as the repairs neared completion, the Centre faced the problem of whom it should negotiate with. Talking openly or only with the Akali leadership whom it had held responsible for allowing the Temple to be misused would have been a loss of face. It was for this reason that talks were started with the head priests and moderates in the Akali ranks.

The Government's strategy of giving importance to the head priests of the Golden Temple was shrewdly aimed at isolating the hawks in the community and strengthening the hands of the religious leaders so that they would prevail over the politicians. The Government also sought to create the impression that political leaders like Tohra, Longowal and former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal were dispensable—although it took the precaution to canvass their opinion in secret parleys in prison. Besides, any accord signed by the priests would inevitably be accepted by the Sikh community at large whereas decisions by politicians could well have been disregarded by some. Said acting president of the SGPC, Rajinder Singh Dhaliwal: "I am not aware of any dialogue between the priests and the Government, but I am certain that whatever decisions the head priests take will be acceptable to the Sikh community."

But the Government could not afford to ignore the political factor altogether, and it associated the second rung of Akali leadership with the talks. The first contacts were established early in September by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, P.C. Alexander, followed up by Buta Singh quietly using political intermediaries to seek out the SGPC leadership. Said Home Secretary M. M. K. Wali: "Many people want a happy end to the problem and all have been working together or individually to sort out the problem."

Pawan Kumar Gupta, newly elected Congress (I) Rajya Sabha member from Punjab, echoed his party's softened stand when he said: "Since the backbone of the extremist movement is broken, there is no question of a confrontation now." But the Congress (I) had little choice. Despite its best efforts, its strategy of isolating the Akalis—both moderates and extremists—from the Sikh community has been less than successful. In the first flush of anger after the cleansing of the Temple, the Government's hard line dictated two basic approaches: to deny the Akalis any political advantage and to get down to rebuilding the Akal Takht as quickly as possible so that there was no danger of its being converted into a memorial.

The hard line didn't succeed for long. Imposing Baba Santa Singh, a rank outsider and one looked down on by the bulk of the Sikh community, the Government failed completely to win popular sanction for his *kar sewa*. The restoration was, after all, done by hired labour. State Bharatiya Janata Party President Baldev Prakash pointed out: "Since the *kar sewa* was turned into a political game by the Congress (I), even well-meaning Hindus and Sikhs stayed away from it. Instead of serving as a healing touch, it has alienated the Sikh community further."

Opposition leaders also cited the tremendous turn-out at last month's World Sikh Convention, despite the Government's blatant attempts to prevent it, as evidence of bungling. The initial relief that overtook the north in the wake of the army action had waned and both Hindus and Sikhs had begun to hold the Government responsible for not restoring normalcy.

Adding to the Centre's problems was the Opposition's new posture of attacking the Centre on its handling of Punjab even though only a short while ago it had been supportive, by and large, of the army operation. The Lok Dal and the BJP, who had been particularly ardent in their support of the army action, had joined the clamour for the removal of the military from the Golden Temple complex. Lok Dal chief Charan Singh, who all along advocated a tough line, was now suddenly sympathe-



tic to the Akalis. Said he: "All right thinking people and patriotic citizens would support the Akalis in their peaceful struggle over their just demands."

The Government was thus coping with the additional burden of trying to deny the Opposition any advantage it might get out of its handling of Punjab, and the stubborn refusal of the Sikh religious leadership to make concessions. Caught in a pincer, it was forced to act. And action, in this case, meant yielding ground. To begin with, it shelved an earlier plan to amend the SGPC Act. The amendment to this Act, which governs the control of the gurudwaras, would have virtually prevented the Akalis from gaining control over the gurudwaras. Even on the political front, the Government had been stepping back bit by bit. For one, it appeared to be willing to consider some of the demands made in the Anandpur Sahib resolution. In fact, Justice R. S. Sarkaria whose commission is looking into Centre-state relations, said he would study the resolution on greater autonomy to the states. This, despite the fact that the Akalis stubbornly refused to send a copy of the resolution formally to the commission, and a copy had to be obtained by it privately.

The army presence in Punjab (top) and the key negotiators (clockwise from top left) P.C. Alexander, Satarawala, Wali and Buta Singh: long haul



In making its overtures, the Government obviously expected that the SGPC and the Akalis would reciprocate and abandon their stiff attitude. In this they met with some measure of success. Narasimha Rao wrote to the head priests listing government conditions for the removal of the army from the Golden Temple. According to Home Ministry sources, Rao's letter was in fact a reiteration of the abortive 10-point agreement that had been hammered out between the army brass led by Lt-General T.S. Oberoi and the Akali and SGPC leadership on July 13, before the rug was pulled from under their feet and *kar seva* handed over to Baba Santa Singh. In this, the SGPC leaders had agreed to "ensure law and order inside the Temple complex" and assured the Government that "no arms other than traditional Sikh weapons are taken inside the complex by anyone." Although no new statement was made last fortnight, Mrs Gandhi made it clear in her broadcast that the Government held them to these statements.

Akali Dal representatives had at that

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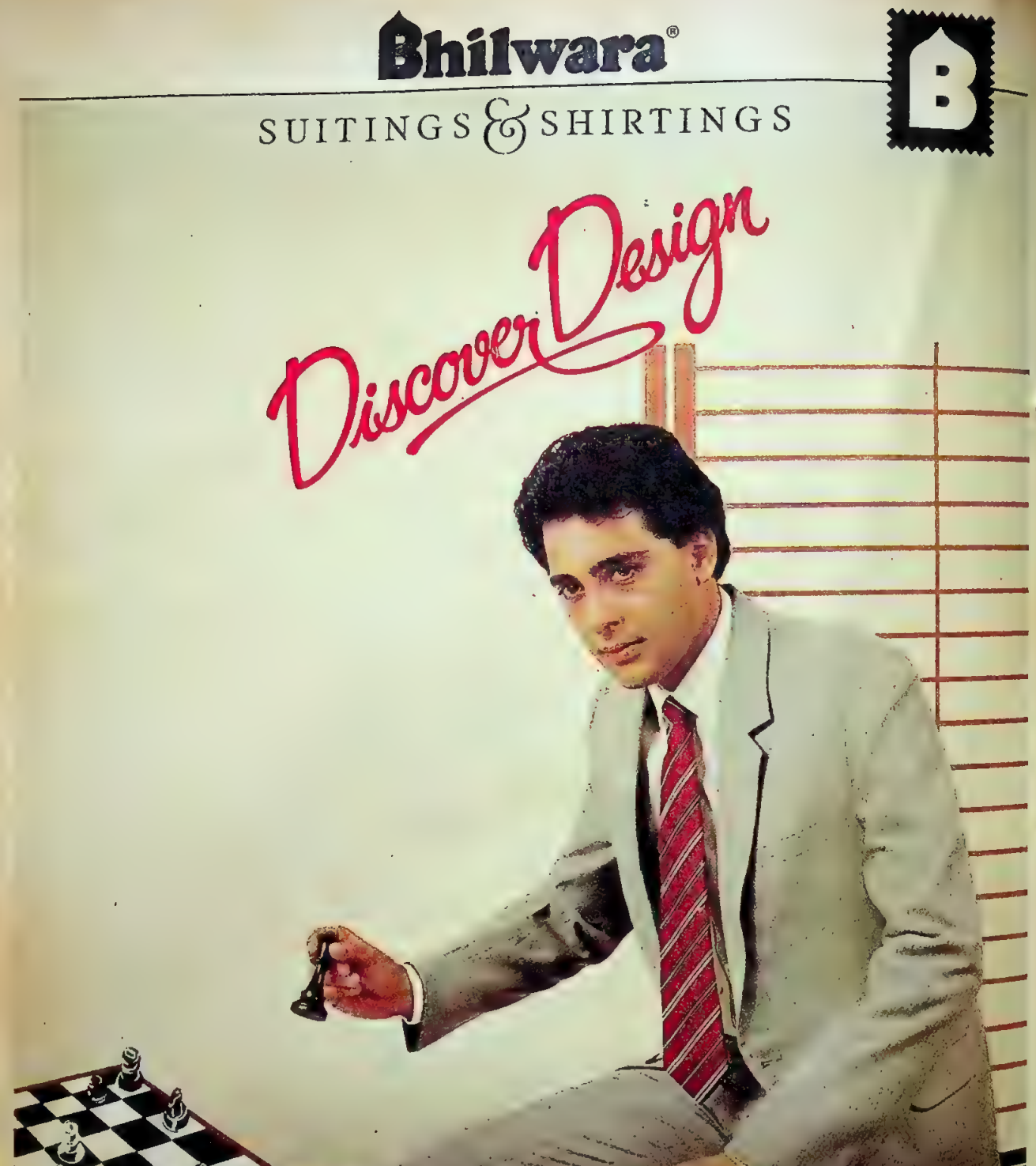
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Devotees at the Golden Temple after the army pull-out: sensitive issues

time also pledged that the Akalis would "render maximum cooperation in the restoration of normalcy in the state." On September 21, the priests assured adviser to the Punjab governor R.V. Subramaniam that they stood by their earlier commitments. Mahalon had on September 18 declared: "The SGPC can ensure law and order and stop the entry of illegal arms. For legal arms there can always be a proper checkpost outside the temple."

Even the priests had to cope with their own dissidents. On September 19, at a meeting of over 60 Akali leaders, the extremist elements attacked the move to accept the Centre's conditions for an army pull-out, and it took some doing before the arrangement could be finalised. Said Governor Satarawala: "We believe there is nothing which cannot be sorted out through talks." Last fortnight's agreement provided some justification for this hope.

ULTIMATELY, it was the pressure of realpolitik that proved to be the determining factor for the Government initiative. Congress(I) members from Punjab had begun to exert considerable pressure on Mrs Gandhi to acquiese to the demand to pull the army out of the Temple. In the last few weeks, the party's MLA's and MP's descended on the Centre no fewer than three times to plead their cause. They pointed out—with justification—that an army pull-out and restoration of normalcy would be essential preconditions to the restoration of a popular government in the state. They argued, with less immediately evident justification, that such a pull-out would not lead to any large-scale flare-up, saying that the army itself was a problem with the Sikhs since it was not equipped to cope with civil strife. The army was disturbed enough by these charges to come out with a public clarification. Lt-General T. Gowrishankar, security adviser to the governor, told INDIA TODAY: "They have been making a big noise about the so-called army atrocities, but so far they have not been able to point out a single specific case in which the army committed any such atrocity or arrested an innocent person."

Whatever the case, it is clear that events in Punjab are poised on a knife edge. They can still go either way, towards a settlement or away from it; towards the healing touch that has so long been elusive or towards rubbing salt in old wounds. With the sensitive Golden Temple issue more or less settled last week, officials were beginning to turn their mind to other aspects of the Punjab problem. And in this, long before they can address the specifics, looms the deep sense of alienation in the Sikh community and the rift between Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab.

The options are not easy: any misguided or hasty move will reinforce the widespread feeling among Sikhs that they are being treated as second class citizens, and further widen the rift between the two communities. And, finding a path that skirts the pitfalls is not easy. The Golden Temple complex may no longer be an issue, but the road ahead is amply booby-trapped. Some top flight Akali leaders may not agree with the way the settlement is heading, and they may feel obliged to adopt stiff postures once they are released. Then, there are enough extremists to try and sabotage, as they did so successfully in the tortured three years preceding Operation Bluestar, any move that might bring Punjab closer to settlement.

Then, there is the entire gamut of political and economic issues around which the Akali Dal built its agitation that remains to be sorted out. There is no clarity on the Government's policy on the water and territorial issues, and Operation

EXTREMISTS

Pakistan Connection

THE PEACE train to Punjab is running on two parallel tracks. On one, is the Government's covert moves to salve Sikh sentiments and resolve the Golden Temple tangle. On the other, is the overt moves by the remnants of the extremists to continue the reign of terror unleashed by the late Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. The brutal slaughter of eight passengers on a bus in terrorist-ridden Gurdaspur district last fortnight was clear warning that the extremist threat is far from over. Government intelligence agencies, however, are more concerned with the aid the extremists are getting and its origin. Reports of terrorist training camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir have become too numerous to be ignored. Correspondent RAJU SANTHANAM *spent a week in the border regions near Jammu and Amritsar to investigate the charges. His report:*

ADVISER to the Punjab Government R.V. Subramaniam, is normally an unflappable man. But last fortnight, he was finding that a difficult task as agitated traders from Batala bombarded him with their doubts about the law and order situation. Subramaniam, however, had other, more serious problems on his mind: the flood of intelligence reports he had received confirming suspicions about Pakistani training camps for Sikh terrorists just across the Indian border.

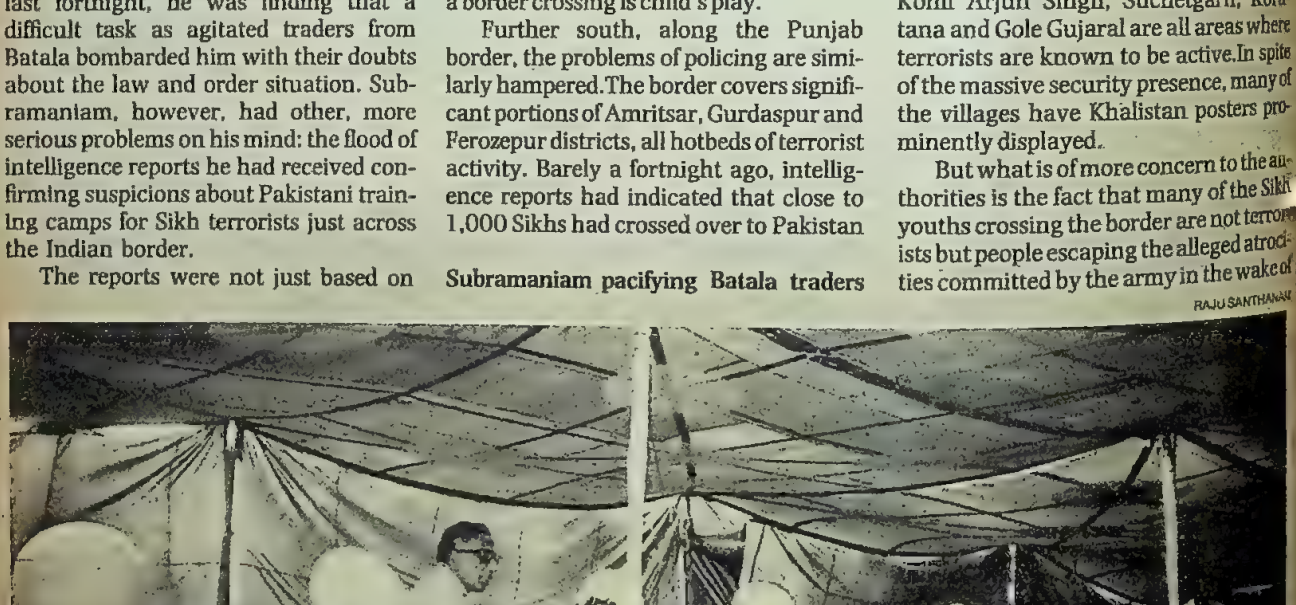
The reports were not just based on assessment or rumour but buttressed by agents who had slipped across in the guise of terrorists and witnessed the training. Available evidence suggests that most of the camps are in the border region across from Jammu. All terrorists taken across for training are reported to be blindfolded and the camps are under the control and supervision of the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), the Pakistani equivalent of RAW. Initial reports indicate that the training camps are located in Lahore and Sialkot and an indeterminate number across the border from Poonch.

The Jammu border, in fact, provides the ideal recruiting ground for ISI agents. Stretching for about 250 km across rugged and inhospitable territory, it is virtually impossible to seal. The pillboxes of the Border Security Force are an average of 2 km apart but that still leaves huge gaps unpoliced. For much of its length, the border is merely an invisible line that traverses rice fields and even a lake. By night, a border crossing is child's play.

Further south, along the Punjab border, the problems of policing are similarly hampered. The border covers significant portions of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur districts, all hotbeds of terrorist activity. Barely a fortnight ago, intelligence reports had indicated that close to 1,000 Sikhs had crossed over to Pakistan from Dera Baba Nanak. In Gurdaspur, the river Ravi criss-crosses the international border with the result that many Indian villages are actually located inside Pakistani territory.

Intelligence files indicate that the most prominent training camp is located at Kartarpur, barely 5 km inside the Pakistan border. The reports also indicate that the main recruiting centre is in Jammu, or, to be more precise, Ranbir Singh Pura tehsil which has a large Sikh population. The majority are settlers who opted for India after the 1947 Partition and so far, their loyalty has been proved in two wars against Pakistan when they provided valuable aid to the Indian army. But after Operation Bluestar, their attitude has turned hostile. Immediately after the army action, a large number of Sikhs from here staged angry protests by burning buses and blockading highways. The area is a smuggler's paradise and intelligence agencies are convinced that the recruiting for the camps are done by regular smugglers from Pakistan who are familiar with the area and the people. Other villages dotted along the border like Musachak, Simbal, Kohli Shahdulla, Kohli Arjun Singh, Suchetgarh, Koratana and Gole Gujaral are all areas where terrorists are known to be active. In spite of the massive security presence, many of the villages have Khalistan posters prominently displayed.

But what is of more concern to the authorities is the fact that many of the Sikh youths crossing the border are not terrorists but people escaping the alleged atrocities committed by the army in the wake of



Subramaniam pacifying Batala traders

RAJU SANTHANAM

RAJU SANTHANAM



Khalistan slogans in Ranbir Singh Pura

Operation Bluestar. While the army has so far denied the reports, villages in Punjab are rife with rumours about torture and harassment of Sikhs. In Amritsar, many Sikhs claim that as far as the army is concerned, every Sikh is an Akali and every Akali an extremist. Sikhs in Jammu have also been incensed by the recent formation of a full-fledged Shiv Sena headed by former RSS member, Devinder Singh Shastri who has demanded that all Shiv Sena activists be issued with arms licences. The Sena's publicised aim is to counter the influence of the Sikhs in the area. Many Sikhs have reportedly crossed over to escape what they sincerely believe is an attempt to wipe them out. Shastri's statement that "we are getting all possible help from the Government" has only made matters worse.

HOWEVER, the most crucial information regarding the training camps in Pakistan has emerged after the arrest of Avtar Singh, the Jammu-based leader of the All India Sikh Student's Federation (AISSF). Avtar Singh is lodged in the special interrogation centre in Jammu where all suspected Pakistani spies are questioned. Avtar Singh is the first extremist to actually admit that he was trained in Pakistan at a camp in July and August. He is also reported to have told his interrogators that Jagir Singh, the nephew of Bhindranwale, supposedly killed in the Golden Temple action, is alive and attending one of the camps along with wanted Amritsar-based terrorist, Balbir Singh. Avtar has also said that there are at least 50 other terrorists in Pakistan who escaped from the Golden Temple.

But the most useful information elicited from him is the file he had on him when he was arrested which contains detailed chapters on insurgency, terrorist methodology and notes he had taken himself from theoretical lectures in the camp. The most worrisome aspect of the file is the chapter on strategy which calls for mass killings of Hindus and selected assassinations of VIP targets. He also had with him a brand new factory fresh Sten gun with all ordinance markings carefully erased.

The Indian security forces, however, are helpless to stop the flow of likely terrorists across the border. In a belated move, security forces are now trying to establish exactly how many people have crossed but it is virtually impossible to do so. Security forces have been going into villages and asking the people to line up for a head count. Lists of those who are missing are made and relatives are questioned as to their whereabouts. But invariably the stock answer is that they are all crew members of various trucking companies who have gone on an interstate journey, something that is rather difficult to check.

The other problem is that none of the extremists crossing into Pakistan or returning after their training are known terrorists or criminals. Most, according to intelligence sources, are believed to be between 15 and 25 years of age and quite prepared to lay down their lives for the Sikh cause. The only cold comfort is in the fact that the extremists lack a leader and their activity is random without any planning or foresight as was in the days before Operation Bluestar. But with the training and weapons they are receiving from across the border, they still represent a major threat which will remain, whatever the outcome of the current peace moves in Punjab.

Bluestar didn't alter the merit of these issues one way or other. There is no evidence that the Government in New Delhi has, in this election year, found the political courage to take up these issues with the administrations of other states who will be affected by settlements—notably Haryana and Rajasthan—and tried to bring about a consensus on what to do. Nor is there any assurance that the Akalis, who stoutly resisted concessions in over three years of negotiation, will now be more forthcoming. On the contrary, the Government should probably be prepared for a considerable amount of posturing from leaders who have to rebuild their credibility in their constituencies before they can even begin to talk about substantive issues. As one Congress(I) MLA from Punjab said: "If we make more concessions now without getting any firm assurances, we will be back to square one and Mrs Gandhi will be projected as a leader who cannot sustain her actions. We have to be very careful in our future strategy."

That strategy will soon have to come to grips with the problem of finding the right forum in which to take the necessary initiatives. Punjab cannot continue under President's rule with its assembly in suspended animation. And, it would be an ill-advised government that tried to organise Lok Sabha elections with the state deprived of a popular ministry. Indeed, it was the inept and often partisan handling of the extremists and the Akali agitation by the Congress (I) ministry that added fuel to the fire. Conditions have to be created in which the army is withdrawn from the state, repressive laws are repealed, and a popular government restored.

"The Punjab problem is emotional, psychological and economic," as Satarawala says. It is also a challenge to mature statesmanship. How well Mrs Gandhi tackles it, balancing the electoral needs of her party and the national interest will demonstrate whether she has learned from the errors of the past three years. Punjab continues to be in a sullen mood though on the surface there is normalcy, and life and business seem to go on. But deep down, the Sikh community is wounded and bears a tremendous resentment. And it remains separated from its Hindu neighbours by a gulf of mutual suspicion. The fate of Punjab will be sealed by how quickly and how effectively these wounds and suspicions are removed. And that will depend on how serious Mrs Gandhi is in pursuing peace in Punjab, shorn of narrow political advantage, shorn of partisanship.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports



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APEX 84

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Reagan's Run



WITH the American presidential election looming two months down the road, President Ronald Reagan's political advisors are expressing what can only be described as joyous trepidation. Or call it gleeful apprehension. "His lead is so big," remarked a senior White House advisor recently, "that it is almost scary". This cross-your-fingers-knock-on-wood sentiment describes the whopping 20-point lead that Reagan has taken over his challenger, Democrat Walter Mondale this late in the race for president.

Barring some unforeseen political cataclysm, Reagan is expected to keep coasting on his comfortable lead—hold his opponents in check with glib, often mindless one-liners—and become the first candidate since Richard Nixon to win re-election. While Reagan's supporters may be scared in a politically superstitious way about some evil eye that may jinx their candidate's lead over Mondale, other Americans, notably political commentators and intellectuals, are scared that American presidential politics is increasingly becoming a matter of style and programming over substance and debate.

Mondale's fervent attempts at forcing Reagan out into the streets for a knock-down and drag-out political debate have so far failed even though two formal television debates between the candidates are scheduled for later this month —hardly the format from which the electorate should make its ultimate choice. Reagan, for his part, has revealed almost nothing of his own thoughts about the choices facing the American nation in the coming four years. Reagan just refuses to come out and fight. Instead, Reagan simply goes on being "presidential" ignoring Mondale and behaving as if there is no race for president.

But the ambience created on the electronic media does not reflect this reality. On American television Reagan is all over the country making speeches, attending receptions, belittling his opponents, promising workers and farmers a greater share in the American economic pie, pledging to fight the communists everywhere. It appears that while Reagan fulminates with verve, Mondale moos guffishly in return.

Actually, this is not so. Reagan's admen and image makers have handled the media adroitly. While keeping the media away from Reagan, his image makers make sure that the media only get to attend and film—a la Doordarshan—only those events that show the President in a fit and fighting political mood.

But Reagan, really, is almost totally isolated from the healthy discourse on which the American presidential system is ostensibly based. He has held fewer press conferences than any other recent president. He travels inside a protective cocoon of security men, advisors and ideological fellow travellers. It is impossible for reporters to get to him. And in a new role that the secret service contingent that travels with Reagan has arrogated to itself, it prevents reporters and TV cameramen from asking or filming politically unpalatable questions during campaign trips.

But this is not to say that the American electorate is left with nothing with which to judge President Reagan. The two planned debates will certainly not be sufficient for Americans to get to know their candidates. But Reagan's views are well known. And when he expresses them he expresses them forcefully as when he refers to Nicaragua's Sandinistas as a "bunch of thugs" or to the Soviets as "cheats and liars".

The factors that seem to be propelling Reagan on to a second term—at least on the surface—appear to be strong economic recovery, a booming economy, a super-strong dollar and the lowest inflation and unemployment rates in more than a decade. In addition, the fact that America is at peace has contributed to his popularity.

But the problems with the Reagan presidency—many of them severe and continuing—should, by all accounts, have made this a close presidential race. The trouble is that nobody knows how to stick Reagan with his own problems, mistakes, or scandals or those of his cabinet or party. He is gifted with a *je ne sais quoi* flair for making troublesome and potentially destructive issues drain off his body politic like water off a duck's back.

Not for nothing is Reagan called the "teflon-coated president". Teflon is a wonder chemical substance put into cooking pots and pans to prevent any substance from sticking to them. And Reagan's teflon armour seems to have deflected all the issues that should have become thorns and knives in his side, especially during this very crucial political year.

The Reagan Administration has been riddled with scandal. His national security advisor Richard Allen had to resign amidst charges of influence peddling. Edwin Meese, his closest confidant and legal counsel failed to win appointment to the post of attorney general because he was exposed as having given friends government jobs in exchange for personal loans. Labour Secretary Ray Donovan is still fighting charges that he has ties with the Mafia. The entire top echelon, Reagan-appointed official hierarchy that ran the Environmental Protection Agency resigned in disgrace following a scandal involving financial mismanagement and corruption. And Jim Baker, Reagan's chief of staff, was under the "debategate" investigation focusing on the theft of former president Jimmy Carter's secret campaign papers that wound up in the Reagan camp during the last election.

Collectively, Reagan's opponents refer to these events as the "sleaze factor" in the White House. But Mondale and the Democrats, so far, have been unable to capitalise on it. And nor have the Democrats been able to do anything with what was known as

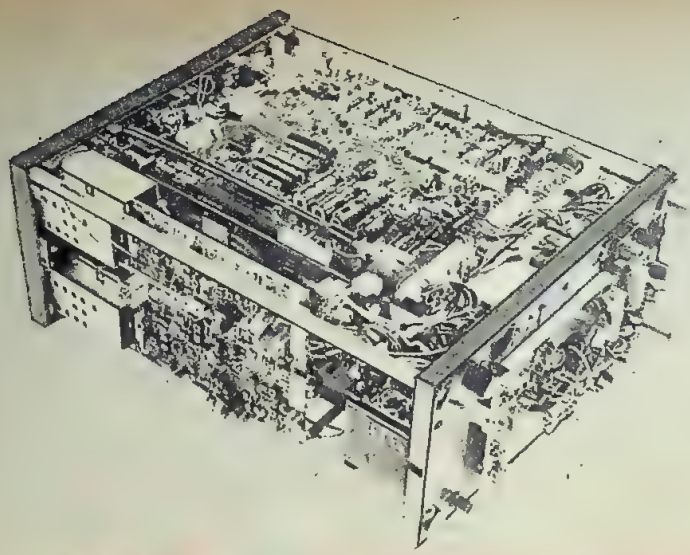


Reagan: macho



Mondale: wimp

Mondale's attempts at forcing Reagan out into the streets for a knock-down and drag-out political debate have so far failed. Reagan goes on being "presidential" ignoring Mondale and behaving as if there is no race for president.



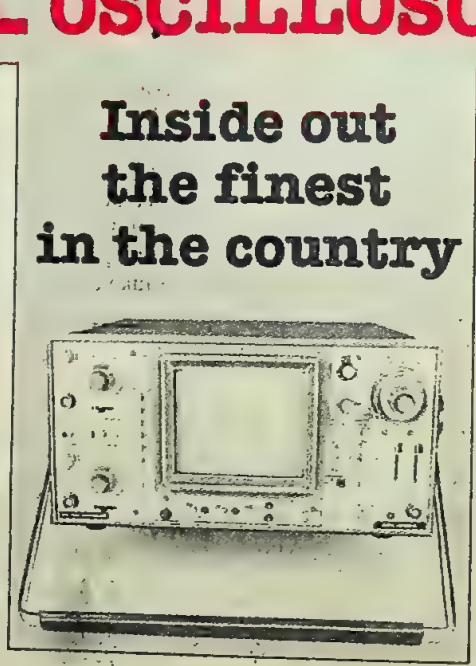
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Reagan's "gender gap". The "gender gap" was an issue designed to appeal to women voters—about 51 per cent of the American electorate. It was patterned by the Democrats and their feminist allies on the fact that Reagan not only ignored issues important to women but that he also denied women good jobs and equal pay with men in his administration.

THE DEMOCRATS chose a woman, Geraldine Ferraro, as Mondale's running mate in the hope that she would inspire a new wave of suffragette zeal that would usher women out in their droves into the Democratic political arena to make election-time mincemeat out of Reagan. It didn't work. The feminists had misread the mood of America's women who are mostly conservative and who vote bread-and-butter and emotional issues rather than on ideological lines. Ironically, Ferraro, in order to be accepted by mainstream American women, has had to deliberately play down her image of a feminist firebrand and project herself, instead, as a law-and-order, home-loving woman with all the traditional American values.

On the economic front, too, Mondale's attacks on the President have made no dent. The Reagan Administration seems to have mortgaged America's economic future to a budget deficit that now totals an astronomical 178 billion dollars. But Mondale has been unable to bring home to America the staggering sacrifices Americans will someday have to make to balance that budget. Under Reagan's monetarist (not supply-side) economic policies, the urban middle class has shrunk somewhat, farm prices have fallen, and middle-income Americans are unable to buy or sell their homes. Mondale's television advertisements against Reagan portray the American President as an inverted Robin Hood who steals from the poor to give to the rich. But all this has been to no avail.

Reagan has made inroads into traditionally Democratic strongholds—labour unions, ethnic voters, and blue-collar and Catholic neighbourhoods. His campaign rhetoric has an onward-Christian-soldiers ring to it. And America seems to lap it up. Appeals to religious sentiment have become such an integral part of the Reagan campaign that the Democrats have accused the White House of indulging in retrograde politics by refusing to separate church from state. At stake are such divisive and deeply felt issues as the right to an abortion and compulsory prayer in public schools. (Public schools are state-financed, high and junior high schools where all education is free.)

Essentially, the presidential race has boiled down to a contest between Reagan the macho and Mondale the wimp. The election is being fought not on economic and social realities but on perceptions and fantasies. Traditionally, Americans have liked "tough guy" presidents: Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy. In contrast Woodrow Wilson was a wimp. Jimmy Carter was a wimp. And Mondale—Carter's number two, who still carries with him the burden of America's miserable "failures" in Afghanistan and Iran—is finding himself unable to shake off the opprobrium of wimpishness.

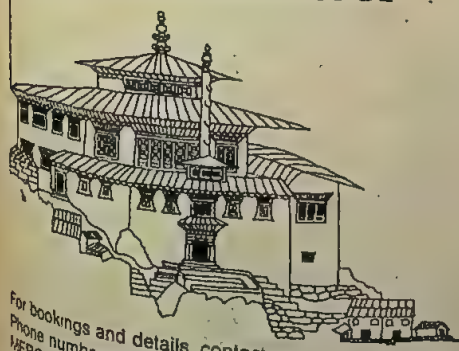
By contrast—notwithstanding the national deficit, notwithstanding the American foreign policy debacle in Beirut, Reagan is seen as a man who rehabilitated a presidency that was emasculated by Watergate and Vietnam. He promises to return the country to God and greatness. And for that reason America seems prepared, and even ready to return him to office—and the devil take the next four years.

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CARLOS AUGUSTO GUARITA



Harmondsworth detention centre

UNITED KINGDOM

Detention Debate

FROM the clinical surroundings of the immigration lounge of London's bustling Heathrow Airport to the grim silence of a detention centre nearby is a big comedown for a number of immigrants to Britain. That is what usually happens to the unwelcome visitors who stand to be whisked away before they even begin to get a whiff of Britain. But there might be hope yet for the detained immigrants as public debate mounts following the publication of a report by an independent organisation, the Runnymede Trust, which espouses better race relations and immigration laws. The report has brought out a startling fact that immigration detention centres at Harmondsworth, Ashford and Queen's are used primarily for the control of Asian and African immigrants to Britain.

The report cites that ordinary visitors and students, men, women and children are among those detained at Britain's ports. According to figures given by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, in 1983 altogether 428 Indians, 624 Pakistanis, 167 Bangladeshis were held at various detention centres as compared to 15 from Australia, one from New Zealand, two from Canada and 122 from the US. The average period of detention was two to three days at Harmondsworth.

The Harmondsworth Detention Centre was opened in the 1970s to accommodate the overflow of air passengers arriving at Heathrow who were denied entry to Britain for various reasons. The complex of single-storey buildings cordoned off by a high steel mesh fence, has the dejected air of abandoned army barracks. Inside the main gate, locked and manned by security guards, a gloomy silence prevails, making it difficult to believe that life exists within. One of the buildings houses the offices of the immigration services, including the Government-funded United Kingdom Immigrant Advisory Services. And in another wing behind a locked door are rooms where the detainees are lodged.

Queen's building at Heathrow Airport is one place where passengers are held if the immigration officers are not satisfied with their bona fides or their intentions of leaving the country at the end of the specified period. And those who do not qualify are removed to the Harmondsworth centre for a short stay before being deported. Alternately if the case needs further consideration or an appeal has been lodged, the detainee could spend a longer period at Harmondsworth or at Ashford.

Why are people from abroad detained? On what basis do the immigration officers at Heathrow decide who to detain? Ex-immigration officer David Marrington, who now works as an immigration lawyer in Bradford, explained what the six weeks' training for his immigration job involved. "Well-dressed and well-spoken people are less likely to be held up though not necessarily always so." Searching questions are asked of fiancees and newly-married couples; letters are examined and even the colour of curtains and wallpaper are checked separately with each married partner to check the validity of the marriage.

According to the Runnymede report, "People in temporary detention are never told why they are there. The onus is on the passenger to provide all the information that is required." Pressure can also be applied on the passenger, by delays and extensive and protracted questioning. Under the Commonwealth Immigration Act, 1962, which first introduced the prospect of detention for immigrants, a passenger's luggage may be searched and all papers and letters examined by the immigration officers. Telephone calls to sponsors or relatives, according to the report, can be made only after the first formal interview of the detained passenger.

At Harmondsworth, the detention rooms are cheaply furnished and contain the minimum of furniture. The windows have bars and the bedroom doors are kept locked during the day to prevent theft of personal property. Barring a TV set, a few chairs, a telephone, and a table tennis room, the centre is bare. A young Pakistani detainee who had jumped the wall the previous night but was caught by the authorities sat glumly in a locked room. Said he: "I don't know why they are holding me here. Why don't they send me back? I am fed up of being here in this place."

Jatun Ahmed Patel, a young woman who had come to England to join her husband, was detained at the Harmondsworth

Detainees at a centre: startling facts

MADAN ARORA



centre. With tears in her eyes she muttered: "No one has come to talk to me. They have not told me why I am here. Can you do anything to help?" It was clear that she neither spoke nor understood a word of English. It was later found that she was allowed out overnight and then deported the following day.

Most inmates of the detention centres find it difficult to keep boredom at bay. There are not many magazines and books for the detainees. An inspector, quoted in the report who was asked why more effort was not made to get Asian books or magazines, replied that since "most Asians can't read, it would be a waste of Home Office money". Complained a businessman from Pakistan who was detained: "If they would tell me why I am here then I can do something about it. There is nothing to do here. I don't watch TV."

At Ashford, the detainees can be held for periods between one month and six months. Ashford accommodates prisoners who violate the Immigration Act. These include overstayers, alleged illegal entrants, immigrants who have either served a prison sentence and have been recommended for deportation or those who have been served with a deportation order in lieu of a prison sentence. Overstayers, says the report, are usually fined, imprisoned and then deported even if they are willing to leave the country immediately.

THE REPORT highlights the cases of Asian seamen often detained on their ships at Britain's ports. In 1978 some Punjabi seamen were handcuffed and removed from their ship and taken to a detention centre while involved in a dispute with their Greek captain concerning wages and work conditions. The report finds that as at airports, entry to the country is most likely to be refused to Indian and Pakistani seamen. Asian sailors say that Britain is the only country where they face restriction on shore leave.

The Home Office has reacted in a predictably prickly manner to the findings of the report and acted quickly by inviting select journalists from British newspapers to visit the detention centres. The Runnymede Report, said the Home Office, was based on 10-year-old cases. But while some of the conditions of stay may have improved and the worst excesses remain isolated ones, long periods of detention continue. A *Guardian* reporter who visited Harmondsworth last month found a Pakistani who had been there for 115 days. In 1982 and 1984 allegations that visitors were not being allowed access to the detainees were made. In 1982, 102 children were held at the Harmondsworth centre despite a resolution passed by the UK Association of the International Year of the Child that no child be detained for breach of any immigration law.

As with virginity tests only public pressure in Britain and abroad can change the system by which breaches of the immigration law become a criminal offence punished by imprisonment or detention. Lord Avebury, who has visited India and Pakistan and sat in on immigration interviews, has been instrumental in putting pressure on the Home Office to improve conditions in the detention centres and bring down the numbers being detained. He told INDIA TODAY: "The Home Office should be readier to grant temporary admission for overseas visitors. Ultimately we would like to see the policy of detention removed from our immigration law." But until this comes about, there will be many sitting in a little barred room at Heathrow wondering why they ever considered leaving their homes for an unknown future.

—BONNY MUKHERJEE

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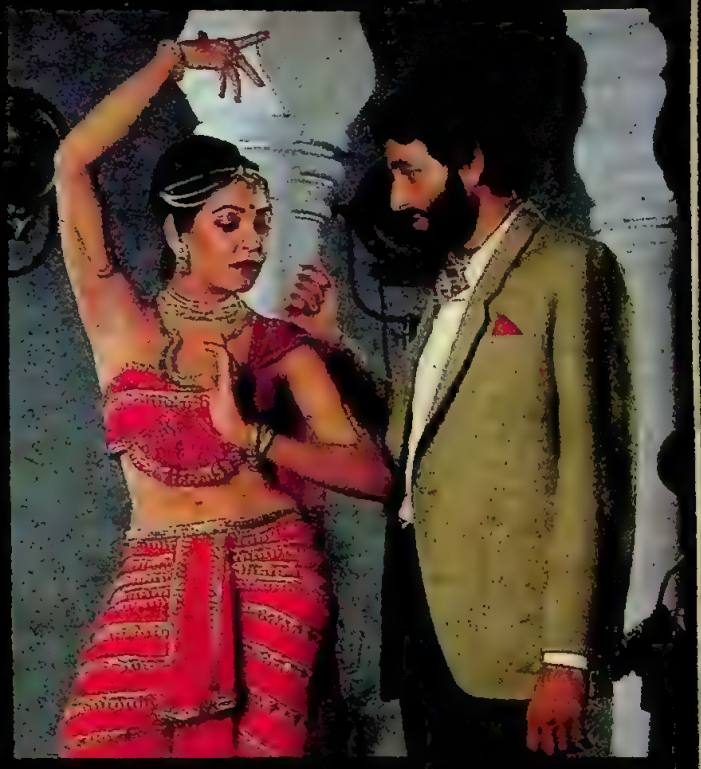
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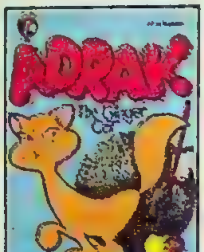
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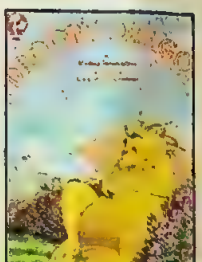
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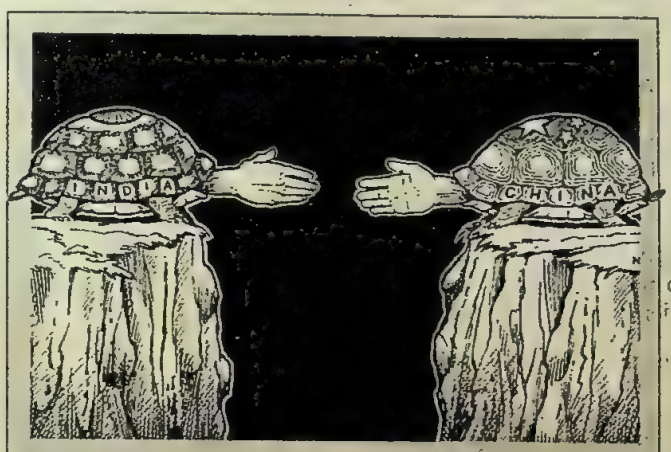
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SINO-INDIAN TALKS

Unresolved Issues



"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you, walk a little faster?" If this line of a well-known Walter de la Mare poem is addressed to the tortoise of Sino-Indian negotiations, the answer will be a shy, demure no. In mid-September there were visible diplomatic preparations to brief the Indian officials' team for the fourth round of talks in four years. The prime minister herself chaired a brief-building session which was followed by another in the Foreign Office convened by Chairman G. Parthasarathi. Reporters were treated to the temporary illusion that the Beijing palavers, lasting a whole week, would open up a new frontier in Sino-Indian relations. When the talks ended on September 22, it was found that on the crucial border issue, the tortoise had hardly moved at all; the two sides could not even arrive at a complete set of agreed principles that would guide the actual negotiations. Still, officials told reporters that the next round, dated tentatively for early next year, would embark upon "substantive talks" on the border. When a diplomatic encounter is described as "frank, friendly and cordial", it means that differences remain unresolved but they do not strain the overall relationship. That is exactly how the Sino-Indian relationship emerged from the week-long talks in Beijing in September.



When the talks ended on September 22, it was found that on the crucial border issue, the tortoise had hardly moved at all; the two sides could not even arrive at a complete set of agreed principles that would guide the actual negotiations.

The India-China talks cannot be seen in isolation from India's relationship with its South Asian neighbours. By coincidence or by design, these relationships happen to be under a general freeze in the fall of 1984. Between India and Sri Lanka, the only "dialogue" that seems to be alive is whether or not there can be or should be an "Indian invasion" of the island and how the self-immolating Sinhala psyche can self-liberate itself from its gigantic pathological Indian obsession. With Pakistan, the warmth of 1982-83 has vanished. Chairman Parthasarathi's conversation with Sahebzada Yakub Khan may hopefully bring the derailed process of talks back on the mutilated track, but not, one is afraid, before election fevers have subsided in India as well as Pakistan. With Bangladesh, all that has been happening since 1983 is short-term extension of agreements which have run out their lives and need to be re-negotiated and rebuilt fulfilling newly generated pressures for wider collaboration.

The neighbours are getting locked into a most dangerous new conflict syndrome. It is not the "classical" issues of conflict pertaining to the partition of the subcontinent that plague bilateral relations any longer. The Kashmir issue is dead and alive. But not even the schizoid Indian or Pakistani expects a war to break out over Kashmir. It is now the internal political turmoils of the South Asian neighbours which are getting them involved in conflictual mental and physical postures. The Sinhala-Tamil conflict is an internal problem of Sri Lanka; it now has put India-Lanka relations under the most severe strain of the post-Independence period. The Indian proclivity to get involved in political struggles in Pakistan for the restoration of democratic rule is more than matched by Pakistan's readiness to intervene, in the bloody protracted conflict in Punjab on the one hand and the Indian Government on the other. The "foreigners" issue of Assam puts a freeze on India's relations with Bangladesh.

Political leaders faced with grave internal problems would be tempted to blame foreign powers or elements for their own failures and shortcomings. This is part of the murky game of politics, domestic and international. In South Asia, the shared history and political experience of the neighbours, their ethnic and cultural involvement with one another make objective detachment from each other's internal problems doubly difficult. It may be unavoidable for India to get enmeshed in Sri Lanka's Sinhala-Tamil conflict, particularly because it immediately impacts the minds of Indian Tamils. But India is denied political options commensurate with the intensity of involvement. Pakistanis may feel a lot of vicarious pleasure at the alienation of Sikhs from the raj in Delhi; some Pakistanis may even see in the vacuous slogan of "Khalistan" the looming shadow of another partition descending on India.

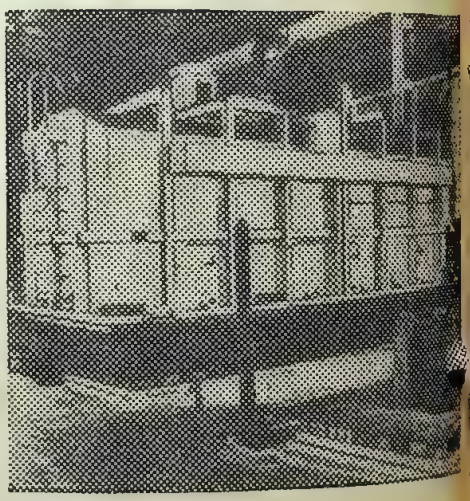
The years 1984-85 are crucial. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are poised for national elections. General Zia-ul-Haq cannot vouchsafe that the "election" he has been contemplating for March 1985 will bring political change and stability. Lt-General Ershad cannot be sure that his own brand of election next year will give him a new lease of political leadership. In India, Mrs Indira Gandhi will probably return but as a much weaker premier.

The Chinese have already mounted a close watch of the Indian political scene. A Chinese analyst of Indian affairs, Li Wenzheng, paid a handsome tribute to Indira Gandhi's management of the economy in the August 27 issue of *Beijing Review*. Only two weeks later, the same Mr Li returned to the pages of *Beijing Review* with a different perception. Evaluating the recent developments in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, Li concluded that "instability has spread from northern India all the way to Andhra Pradesh in the south" and that "the political tests of strength in India may not be over". If this be true about India, it is truer with regard to Pakistan and Bangladesh. That is one reason why the tortoise that seems to have taken over the direction of South Asian and Sino-Indian relations is hastening far too slowly.

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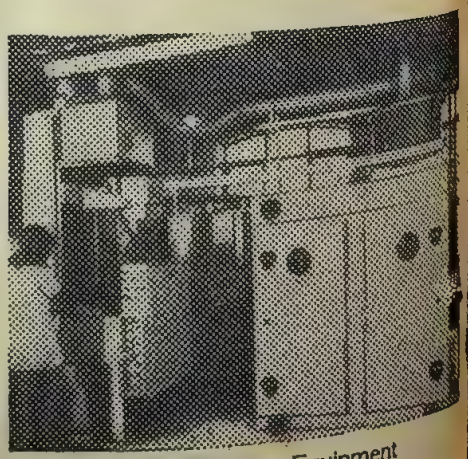
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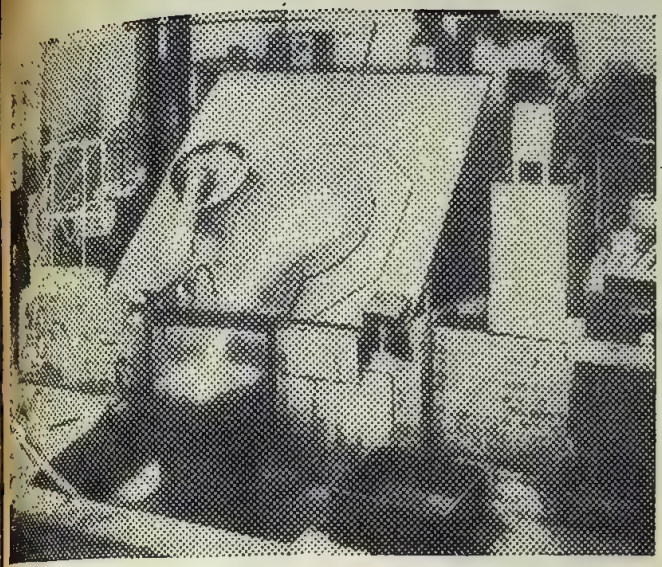
Rectangular bell furnace

Landmarks

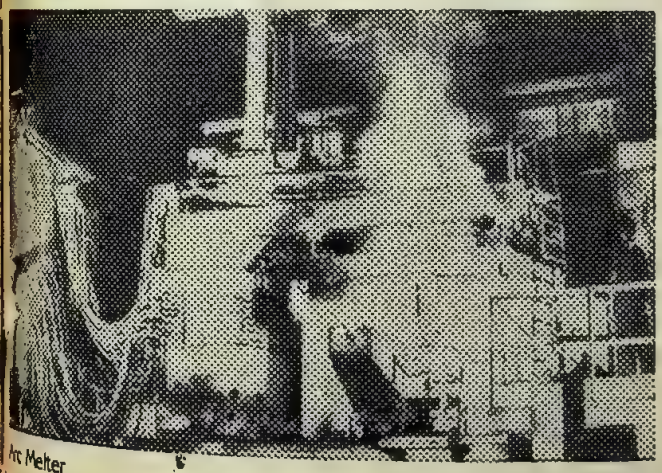
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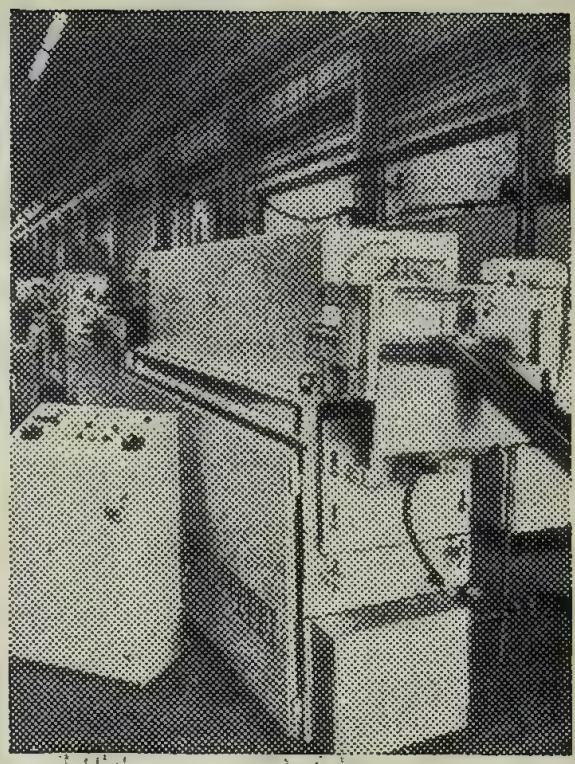
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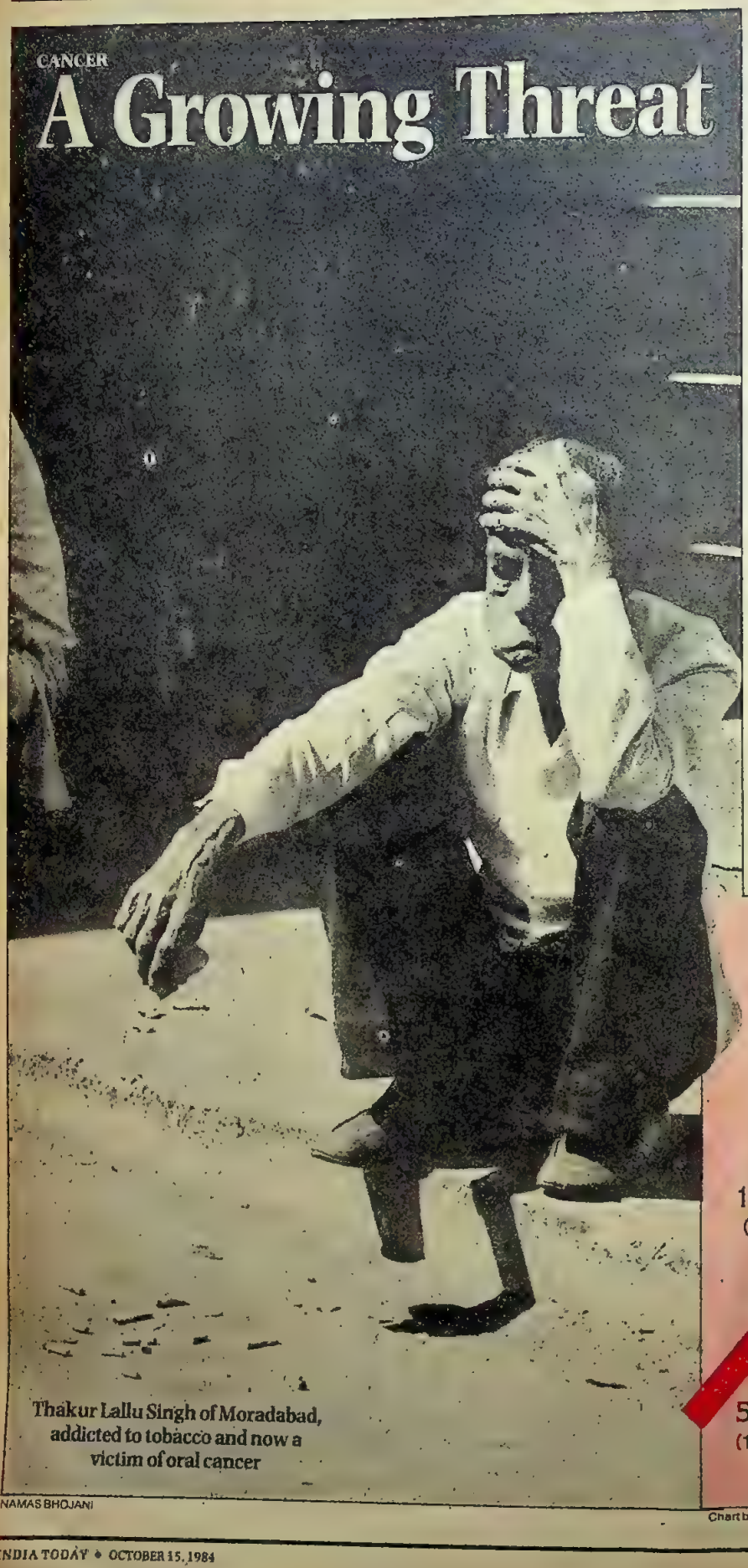
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CANCER

A Growing Threat



Thakur Lallu Singh of Moradabad, addicted to tobacco and now a victim of oral cancer

NAMAS BHOJANI

SOMEWHERE along the way, the body becomes its own enemy. Among the 1,000 crore cells that comprise a human being, one cell rebels. In size, it is so tiny that it takes a million cells to form a pinhead. But its voraciousness is unlimited. While a normal cell grows at a fixed rate, the wayward cell is anarchic and multiplies at a relentless and uncontrollable speed. Like a crab, it burrows into the sands of the flesh and becomes a rapidly-growing tumour, obstructing normal bodily functions. If untreated, the cells sow the seeds of rebellion all over the body. By that stage, death is inevitable and it could come as quickly as six months after the first warning signal.

Despite decades of research and experiments, scientists are still unable to explain why a normal cell turns cancerous. If discovered, a cure for cancer will represent the biggest breakthrough in modern medical science. But till then, cancer continues to hold the whole world hostage to its dread, including India where health officials are suddenly discovering that cancer is one of the top three killers of adults in the country. At a national seminar on cancer convened recently by the Union Health Ministry in New Delhi, some eye-opening facts were presented, taking by surprise even

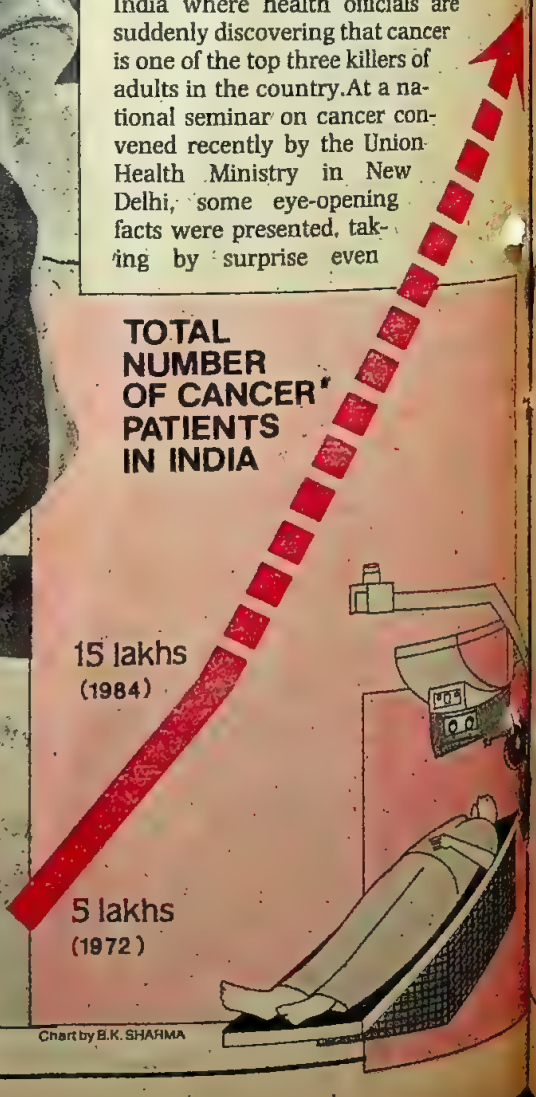


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

majority of the delegates present:

- Cancer, along with heart disease and tuberculosis, is the leading cause of adult deaths in the country. Ten years ago, it was ranked eighth.
- An average of five lakh people contract cancer every year in India. By the year 2000, that figure is expected to rise to 15 lakh a year.
- Three lakh Indians die every year from cancer. Two out of every four die in the first year of contracting the disease.
- Cancer affects Indians 10 to 20 years earlier than in other countries, at a time when they are at their most productive.
- Currently, there are 15 lakh Indians stricken by cancer. Only 70,000 will be able to receive adequate treatment at specialised clinics.

Grim facts these but even grimmer is the fact that tragically few Indians are aware of them. Barely six years ago, a World Health Organisation (WHO) study on cancer had warned that "cancer is a much more serious health problem in India than is recognised by many authorities. The mortality rate from this disease seems to be steadily increasing over the past several decades". Still, Indian health officials remained complacent, even ignorant, about the insidious invasion that was quietly taking place. The reason, in the main, was the widely-held myth that cancer posed a threat only to the more affluent and industrialised countries of the world where life expectancy was high. The myth was further bolstered by the belief that cancer, in its 285 forms, mainly affected people over 35. Consequently, cancer was never put on the priority hitlist for national health. There were, of course, other reasons. As one health official explained bluntly: "People were dying of other diseases anyway before they contracted cancer, so nobody really bothered very much."

It was not till as late as 1980 that the myths surrounding cancer rudely exploded in the wake of a WHO report on the state of the world's health. The report highlighted the then startling conclusion that 60 per cent of all cancer cases were being reported from the developing world, with India being a major contributor.

Predictably, the warning bells caught Indian health officials napping. Currently, the country has just 10 specialised cancer institutes and only 65 medical colleges with the capacity to combat the disease. Together, they have the capability of treating barely 70,000 of the 15 lakh cancer patients in the country. Further, a majority of the clinics are situated in the urban centres where they are heavily overloaded. The Tata Memorial Centre in Bombay, considered the best in the country, treats an average of 500 cancer patients a day and its radiation therapy machines are switched on round the clock.

But the larger problem is the near-total ignorance about the disease leading to a majority of cancer patients only going for treatment when it is far too late. Netai Chandra Adak, 40, a farmer in West Bengal's Midnapore district, is a classic example. Adak discovered a tiny lump on his left hand which he ignored. Two years later, it had grown into a massive tumour. He was rushed to the cancer centre in Thakurpur where doctors amputated his arm. But they are pessimistic about his survival chances since they believe the disease has spread to other parts of his body.

HEALTH officials are hard put to explain the sudden growth of cancer cases in the country. However, one of the major causes cited is the dramatic increase in life expectancy for the average Indian. At the turn of the century, the average life expectancy was a mere 23 years which dropped even further to 20 years in 1921. With the improvement in medical facilities, the figure jumped to 32 years by 1951. Today, the average Indian can hope to live till 52 years. Says Usha Luthra, senior deputy director-general, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR): "There seems to be a two-way push for cancer. Not only has the population been ageing but life-styles have been changing rapidly. What we are seeing right now is only the tip of the iceberg."

The result is that India faces the unenviable task of not only curbing the high incidence of communicable diseases but also checking the rapid rise of non-communicable diseases like mental illness, heart disease and cancer. Of the three, cancer is causing the maximum worry. Warns Harcharan Singh, joint adviser to the Planning Commission on health: "Cancer has undoubtedly emerged as a major health problem in the country." Statistics collated by the Central Health Intelligence Bureau, the country's watchdog body, would, however, belie the reality. It blissfully reported that in 1982 there were only 33,378 cancer cases in the entire country of which 1,837 were fatal. In fact, most of the misconceptions about cancer exist because no accurate national figures are actually available. For decades, the only reliable data on cancer originated from the Bombay cancer registry run by the Indian Cancer Society, a voluntary organisation, and from sample surveys conducted by various private researchers. In

BIKASH DAS



For Pushpamala Dutta, 74, ignorance is a form of bliss. She is not aware that the doctors have classified her as a terminal cancer case. She is even oblivious to the fact that she is suffering from cancer. "The doctors are treating me and I will soon go back home," she says. But doctors say she came for treatment too late and there is little hope of saving her life.

BIKASH DAS



Indranath Haldar, 14, waits in suspense for the doctors to tell him whether or not his right arm is to be amputated. The malignant tumour could be arrested with costly treatment but his family cannot afford it. Doctors have decided on chemotherapy with cheaper drugs but that means another six months before the verdict on his arm can be taken.

REHABILITATION

Healing Touch

IT IS just not enough to add years to life. It is equally important to give life to the years added." These words painted at the entrance of the Rehabilitation Centre in Bombay run by the Indian Cancer Society, a voluntary organisation, have added meaning to the lives of the 5,000 cancer patients that come for help to the centre every year.

Facing severe disabilities and suffering from psychological trauma, patients who have been treated for cancer hardly ever appreciate the new lease of life they have received. But the centre's healing touch gets them back on their feet and they begin to lead normal lives. Usha Bhatt, the centre's director said: "We teach them to fly out with their own wings."

Started in 1961 in the basement floor of the Tata Memorial Hospital the centre has been doing some remarkable work in rehabilitating cancer patients in the past two decades. It now has its own one-storeyed buildings overlooking a sprawling slum on the Jerbai Wadia Road in Bombay. Before the centre started Bhatt made a study of the socio-economic problems of cancer patients and found that one third of them were forced out of their jobs because of the disease. In most of the cases they were the only earning members and their families were economically incapacitated.

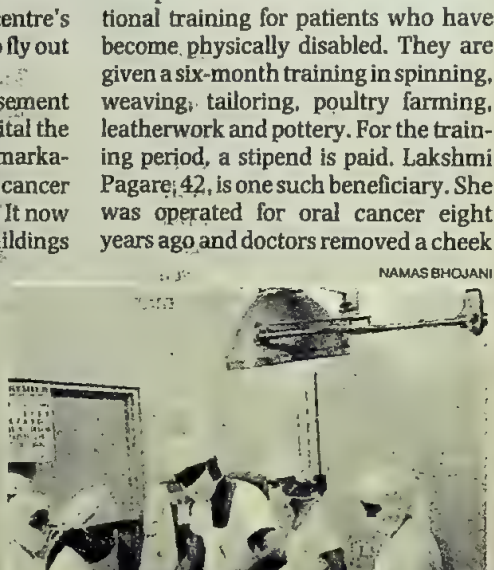
Her study showed that after treatment more than half of them left worse off because they had been disabled either mildly or severely. Some lost their limbs, others organs such as the stomach, liver, lung and kidneys. Yet others lost their larynx or voice box and women patients had to have one of their breasts removed. Says Bhatt: "Most of them feel helpless when they come to us."

To overcome their feelings the centre hit upon a unique idea: they used people who had overcome their disabilities successfully to teach others. D.C. Joglekar, 57, a retired army officer, is one of them. Eight years ago after suffering from cancer of the larynx, Joglekar had his voice box removed. He had to learn the difficult art of using belching sounds made by his oesophagus or food pipe to speak. Today he teaches oesophagus speech to patients who have had their voice boxes removed. One of his students, Murali Manohar Sait, 38, thought that he would never be able to speak again. But under Joglekar's coaching Sait says: "I feel it's possible for me to talk normally."

Shankuntala Jain is another example of the centre's ingenuity. After having cancerous breasts removed 20 years ago she now works at the centre counselling those who have undergone similar operations. She also helps them make the breast prostheses. Previously one had to import these but using indigenous foam material Jain is sucessfully making prostheses which last for four to five years.

Apart from this the centre has vocational training for patients who have become physically disabled. They are given a six-month training in spinning, weaving, tailoring, poultry farming, leatherwork and pottery. For the training period, a stipend is paid. Lakshmi Pagare, 42, is one such beneficiary. She was operated for oral cancer eight years ago and doctors removed a cheek bone which disfigured her face. Her husband deserted her and she was made to look after Kishore, her 12-year-old son. The centre taught her to make leather bags and now she earns Rs 75 a week. She sends her son to school and her husband has come back.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Patient operated on at the centre

Unfortunately the centre is the only one of its kind in the country. Bhatt is keen that other states follow suit. Says she: "If we don't teach them how to support themselves they will become beggars."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

1975, when the earliest published figures became available, they gave an alarming insight into just how serious the cancer threat was. The figures showed that 135 out of every one lakh people in Bombay suffered from cancer. Warns eminent cancer specialist Dohrab Jussawalla: "There is a simmering epidemic of cancer in the country. We can only now see the problem rearing its ugly head. It is likely to increase by three or four times very soon."

Realising they are battling an invincible enemy, health officials have finally decided to tackle the problem head-on. A core committee chaired by the director-general of health services was recently formed to hammer out a national cancer control programme. The draft that resulted was presented recently at the cancer seminar in New Delhi and it has now been sent to the Planning Commission for approval. Meanwhile, the ICMR has set up the first ever national cancer registry project in India at a cost of Rs 2 crore to outline the magnitude of the problem. Six registries have already come up in Bombay, Bangalore, Madras, Trivandrum, Chandigarh and Dibrugarh in Assam to quantify the incidence of cancer and identify the high-risk groups. Says Lalit Sanghvi, the registry's project officer in Bombay: "We will now have a nation-wide picture of the problem and for once we can be fairly secure in our projections."

That is already in evidence. An analysis of the first year's results has already produced information contrary to what was earlier indicated. The Bombay cancer registry had earlier indicated that cancer occurred more frequently in men than in women. But findings in Bangalore and Madras showed the opposite. In Bangalore, for instance, 98 out of every one lakh men had cancer while the corresponding figure for women was as high as 133. Madras showed similar trends indicating



DR DOHRAB JUSSAWALA
Cancer specialist

"We must equip the medical colleges and incorporate cancer control into our multi-purpose health system."

that the cancer threat to women was greater than was originally believed. Equally vital was the discovery that in the comparatively younger age group of 35 to 64, the incidence of cancer was exceptionally high; 165 for every one lakh men and 294 for every one lakh women. The logical if startling conclusion was that cancer was affecting Indians a good 10 to 20 years earlier than it was in other countries. Also discovered was the fact that cancer of the alimentary or food canal accounted for more than half the male cancer cases.

ACCORDING to specialists like Sanghvi, the reason for that is the Indian habit of paan and tobacco chewing and bidi smoking. Almost 80 per cent of the men surveyed in rural India either smoked bidis or chewed tobacco, a majority indulging in both. The myth that smoking bidis was less dangerous than cigarettes was dispelled by researchers at the Tata Memorial Centre who proved that bidis had twice the tar content of cigarettes and an equal quantity of nicotine. It was established that compared to non-smokers, those who smoked bidis ran a 14-fold risk of contracting mouth and pharyngeal cancer and a threefold risk if they smoked hookahs. Cigarette smokers, on the other hand, run the risk of contracting lung and larynx cancer. In urban centres like Bombay, Trivandrum and Chandigarh, where a majority of cigarettes are consumed, lung cancer ranks second while among the Sikhs, lung cancer is almost non-existent. Tobacco and paan chewers have no cause for complacency either. A high correlation has been established between paan and tobacco chewing and oral cancer. Says Sanghvi: "The message is clear. These people will have to give up or reduce the habit otherwise we will lead the world in oral cancer." Sanghvi strongly feels that the only alternative is to conduct research on how to make indigenous smoking and chewing habits less harmful since mere propaganda regarding the hazards of smoking and chewing tobacco is hardly going to have much effect, especially in rural areas.



DR LALIT SANGHVI
project officer, National Cancer Registry

"Sixty per cent of all cancer patients die. It is more of a killer than people realise."

Similarly, the high incidence of cervical cancer among Indian women is directly related to their living habits. Says V. Shanta, director, Cancer Institute, Madras: "Lack of genital hygiene is a major contributing factor for cervical cancer." That is borne out by the inescapable fact that more Hindu women suffered from cervical cancer than their Muslim counterparts. This is in direct relation to the fact that there is a high incidence of penile cancer among Hindu men as compared to Muslim men who are circumcised—a vital factor in genital hygiene. Research has shown that in both urban and rural areas, lack of penile hygiene not only exposed males to the risk of cancer but their wives as well.

Other findings by the institute indicated clearly that the reasons for the prevalence of cervical cancer are far more complex. Research conducted by the Cytological Research Centre in New Delhi produced some significant findings. In examining over 80,000 women, researchers discovered that women who married when they were 15 years old and below ran a 1.5 times higher risk of developing cancer than those who married at a later age. The study also revealed that an astonishing 65 per cent of women who had cervical cancer suffered from genital herpes, the sexually transmitted disease that is convulsing the West. Further, cancer seemed to develop faster in women who suffered from herpes.

It was also found that cervical cancer increases in women with the number of pregnancies they go through. The average Indian family has four or five children. The risk of developing cancer, it was found, is seven times higher for a mother of four or five children than it is for a woman with two children. Says Krishna Bhargava, director of the Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology in Bangalore: "The failure of the family planning programme in India is a major factor in the rise of cervical cancer." Children are not free from the looming cancer threat either. Children below the age of 14 are vulnerable to cancer of the blood, kidneys, eyes and the brain and around 15,000 children fall prey to the disease every year.

Treatment for cancer in India varies from surgical removal of the cancerous area to exposing the patient to radiation therapy (*see box*). But existing facilities are

ANIL PURI



Shanti, 40, mother of five, is in the third stage of breast cancer. Doctors at the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Chandigarh, where she is being treated, say she would have died were it not for the cobalt treatment they have been giving her. Though costly, it is being given at a heavily subsidised rate so she can afford it.

SIVARAM STUDIO



For K. Ajimon, 9, from Trivandrum, the nightmare began when he was sent home from school because of a sore in his eye. The sore turned out to be a malignant tumour in a muscle of his right eye. The man treating him, Dr Krishna Nair, says it will be a miracle if vision is restored. The boy's mother, Fatima Beevi, is sustained by her faith. "I am praying to Allah to save my son," she says.

TREATMENT

Cause & Effect

IN INDIA treatment for cancer is lopsided. Highly sophisticated hospitals like the Tata Memorial Centre in Bombay rub shoulders with radiation units having outdated machinery in various medical colleges. The cancer registry project of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) found that surgery and radiotherapy, the most commonly used methods for curing cancer in India, are still woefully inadequate. Anti-cancer drugs are expensive and have dangerous side effects such as excessive nausea, loss of hair, vomiting, diarrhoea and depression. In fact, the treatment may be worse than the cure and most cancer institutions in the country have a special board to monitor patients being given chemotherapy. Some of the causes, symptoms and treatment for the major cancers are listed below:

Cancer of the oral cavity: Responsible for causing almost half the cancers in men and about 20 per cent in women. Cancer of the oral cavity occurs usually in heavy smokers and paan and tobacco chewers. The symptoms are sores that do not heal, white patches, thickening of tissue, sore throat and difficulty in chewing and swallowing. It is curable in the early stages when the tumour is localised by surgery or radiotherapy.

Cancer of the uterine cervix: Accounts for 25 per cent of the cancers in women and the major predisposing factors are early marriages, multiple sexual partners, poor genital hygiene and venereal disease such as genital herpes. It takes many years to grow and the symptoms like vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse and monthly periods come only in the later stages. Cervical cancer can be detected in the early stages and even pre-cancerous symptoms with a simple painless clinical test developed by scientist Georges Papinacolau. A swab is inserted into the vagina and a smear is taken from the cervix. This is examined under a microscope. If cancerous tumours are found they are either surgically removed or irradiated. Cure rates are 80 per cent if detected early.

Cancer of the lung: Although not as high as cancer of the oral cavity, lung cancer has been showing a tendency of increasing rapidly in the country. Almost 80 per cent is estimated to be caused by cigarette smoking. Lung cancer is difficult to diagnose in the early stages. Some of the symptoms are persistent cough, change in cough, chest pain and blood in the sputum. It may remain latent for almost 15 to 30 years. Can be detected by examination of sputum or by examining the lungs with a bronchoscope. It is treated by removal of the diseased lobe or lung. Sometimes radiation therapy or chemotherapy is employed. However chances of cure are extremely bleak.

Breast cancer: Breast cancer comes a close second to cervical cancer in India. Its causes are not known so far but it is suspected that it could be either because of dietary fat or imbalance in the female hormone estrogen levels. There are no symptoms in the early stages. But later a lump or thickening in the breast (80 per cent are not cancer), changes in the breast contour and lump in the armpit could develop. There could be nipple discharge or retraction and puckering of the breast skin. The breast could also become enlarged. In the late stages there could be pain and swollen glands in the armpit. Could be diagnosed by monthly self-examination or by a biopsy—treatment varies according to stages. In the early stages the tumour is removed and radiation therapy given. Later cases the breast involved is removed. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy are usually used as an adjuvant therapy.

NAMAS BHOJANI



A radiation therapy unit in operation

woefully inadequate. Says Praful Desai, director, Tata Memorial Centre: "Facilities for treatment of cancer in India are sketchy at best and non-existent at worst." The Tata Centre, considered the best-equipped in the country, is literally flooded with patients and treats 500 a day. Its five major operating theatres are always occupied and together conduct about 50 major and minor operations daily. The remaining nine specialised cancer institutes in the country face similar pressures. In the Kerala Institute, the radiation units break down with irritating frequency because of overloading, causing delays in treatment. Says Jussawala: "Radiation therapy units are few and far between in the country. The few available are not adequately staffed or monitored as well as they should be." The great danger in that is if radiation is administered improperly, instead of reducing cancer, it can cause other forms of cancer.

The core committee which went into the problem of facilities has stated that there is an immediate need to install around 800 radiation therapy centres. The total cost for the equipment would be in the region of Rs 108 crore or ten times the current budget allocation for cancer. Manpower is also in crucially short supply. The committee found that the country needs 1,300 more radio-therapists, 700 radiographers, 425 physicians and 800 extra surgeons. Coupled with the inadequate facilities and the prohibitive cost of newly-introduced anti-cancer drugs, is the fact that a majority of cancer patients only come forward for treatment when it is far too late. This is precisely why the mortality rate for cancer in India is abnormally high. Says Sanghvi; "Sixty per cent of all cancer patients die. Cancer is more of a killer than people realise and it can kill in less than half a year."

Unfortunately, the rehabilitation of



DR KRISHNA BHARGAVA
director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology

"The failure of the family planning programme in India is a major factor in the rise of cervical cancer."

surviving cancer patients is an area of major neglect. Unlike other diseases, cancer causes disability of any part of the body. Most cancer patients also suffer from severe psychological problems after being treated. The rehabilitation centre in Bombay run by the Indian Cancer Society is the only one of its kind in the country (*see box*). Says Usha Bhatt, the centre's director: "The main problem we face is the defeatist attitude of the patients."

THE ONLY silver lining for India is that two of the most widely prevalent cancers, those of the oral cavity and the uterine cervix, have an 80 per cent chance of cure if detected early enough. However, early detection of cancer is handicapped by the uncooperative attitude of the state governments. Since health is a state subject, it is the state governments that have been tardy in setting up early cancer detection centres (ECDC's). The Centre has agreed to fund 50 ECDC's in the country for the Sixth Five Year Plan but so far only half of them have been set up by the states concerned. Fumes M.G.K.Menon, Planning Commission member: "The states just don't seem to be interested or bothered about the problem. It's a gross failure that we have been unable to set up even the planned number of ECDC's."

But the state health departments, battling to control communicable diseases, have neither the time nor the commitment to tackle cancer as well. Says Tamil Nadu Health Secretary, R.Shanmugham: "I won't be able to furnish figures about the money allotted separately for cancer treatment because it is not allowed under a separate head at all." Faced with what seems an invincible threat, the Government has finally got down to seriously tackling the problem. Reports of two specialists committees headed by K.N. Rao and P.H. Wahi, which were gathering cobwebs, have now been dusted off and re-examined. The Health Ministry is getting down to implementing their recommendations. For the Sixth Five Year Plan which began in 1980, the Centre allocated Rs 11.5 crore for cancer prevention and control. But despite the increased outlay, the allocation formed only 3 per cent of the total health budget. Meanwhile, the finances are being used to upgrade the existing cancer centres and to set up the 50 ECDC's. Another 15 radiation therapy units are to be provided. All these were recommended by the two committees almost 10 years ago.

Meanwhile, the core committee comprising top cancer specialists has drafted the long-awaited national cancer control programme (NCCP) which is scheduled for launching next year. The NCCP will suggest measures to prevent, control and treat cancer. For the Seventh Five Year Plan slated to start in 1985, the Planning Commission has formulated a working group headed by Jussawala to chalk out an appropriate and effective budget allocation for combating the disease.

The present strategy recommended by specialists and health officials is that the system to tackle cancer be integrated into the existing health structure. Argues Planning Commission's Harcharan Singh, "We cannot look at cancer in isolation. There will be no vertical health structure for cancer." Adds Jussawala: "The answer is not in having more Tata Memorials. We cannot afford institutions. These should be used only as referral centres. We must first equip the 106 medical colleges that are treating cancer and also incorporate cancer control into our multipurpose health system."

The NCCP is being drafted with precisely this in mind. The country's 6,000 primary health centres, 65,000 village subcentres and three lakh village health workers are to be utilised for educating people about cancer and also providing them the facilities for treating the disease. District hospitals are to be equipped for treatment of the less-complicated cases. The existing 10 regional centres are to be converted into referral centres with another six being added to cope with the increasing demand. A National Cancer Advisory Board to monitor the functioning of the NCCP is also likely to be set up soon. If afforded the proper priority, the NCCP should prove successful in checking the invasion of cancer into the country. But if its ambitions are thwarted by bureaucratic apathy, cancer could become India's number one killer in the 1990s.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with bureau reports



DR PRAFUL DESAI
director, Tata Memorial Centre

"Facilities for treatment of cancer in India are sketchy at best and non-existent at worst."

SIVARAM STUDIO



V.K. Neelakandan, 84, is no stranger to the Trivandrum cancer centre. He has been subjected to radiation 26 times over a period of six years. Says he: "I used to smoke 50 beedis and drink three glasses of toddy a day. For the last five years, I have not touched either." But he has no illusions. "I have been preparing for death for the last five years," he shrugs.

SIVARAM STUDIO



For Ramani, 35, the fear of death has been a constant companion ever since she was told she had cancer of the uterus. In Trichur, where she comes from, her two children wait with equal trepidation for the final day. Ramani has adopted a fatalistic attitude. "Even though the doctors claim that I am okay after my operation, everybody says that I will die."

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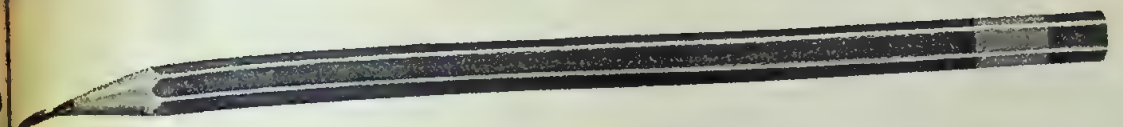
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INTACH is committed to the cause of conserving India's heritage.

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Based in New Delhi, INTACH has already set up regional chapters in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bombay, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Madras, New Delhi and Varanasi. We welcome the support of all who share our concern, and hope to have more than a million members by the end of the year.

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TAMIL NADU

Loan Scandal

LAST fortnight, when the State Bank of India lodged an official complaint with Superintendent of Police (special branch) A.X. Alexander in Madras that two of its city branches had been duped into giving Rs 12 lakh by way of loans for purchase of eight second-hand lorries, the lid was finally blown off a four-year-old bank loan scandal involving city branches of no less than 14 nationalised banks besides some private institutions.

Together, these had financed the purchase of nearly 40 second-hand lorries and the setting up of a host of dubious small-scale industrial units. The total amount of loans advanced added up to as much as Rs 72.35 lakh. Confirming the bank's complaint, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Intelligence) K.K. Rajasekaran Nair said: "We are investigating into it. We have to find if there is a cognisable criminal offence in it, or the matter merits only a departmental inquiry." What they will actually dig into is a brilliantly-planned racket master-minded by a Robin Mayne.

Banking circles in the city woke to the scandal when, on July 14, the Bankers Club of Anna Nagar in north-west Madras, an informal group of bank managers, issued a "very important and confidential" circular to all nationalised banks in the city. It cautioned the banks about "a group of men operating in Madras city under one Robin Mayne, a person posing to be highly influential with various government departments and political leaders". The document then detailed the modus operandi. These men pose as transport contractors of various government agencies and also produce documentary evidence to that effect. They approach bank managers and executives, promising to get substantial state government deposits. They also manage to get the deposits for a short-term period with an assurance of renewal thereafter. Winning the confidence of the bank officials, they approach the bank for finance to buy second-hand lorries. "After availing of the loans, these persons do not turn up and are not paying any instalments. The deposits are withdrawn after three months and the process gets repeated with another bank."

The pattern fitted the facts. The Nungambakkam branch of Dena Bank in central Madras, where it all started, got a deposit of Rs 5 lakh from the Agricultural Marketing Board through Robin Mayne way back in 1980-81. After the deposit



"Assuming that I am a cheat, how can bank managers be absolved of the responsibility of having sanctioned and disbursed these loans?"
ROBIN MAYNE

was made Mayne got a Rs 3 lakh loan from the branch, for a friend, to set up a small-scale industry. According to bank sources while there was hardly any recovery on the loan, the deposit was transferred to another bank after six months. What followed was a series of repeat performances:

- Mayne secured a Rs 12 lakh deposit for the Chetput branch of United Commercial Bank from the Agricultural Marketing Board in mid-1983, and was advanced a loan of Rs 3 lakh for the purchase of two second-hand trucks;
- he got state government deposits worth Rs 70 lakh for various branches of the State Bank of India in Tamil Nadu in 1983. The Saidapet and Thousandlights branches of the bank advanced his "friends" Rs 12 lakh to buy eight second-hand lorries in order to transport agricultural produce;
- the Anna Nagar branch of the Indian Overseas Bank was lured with a Rs 3 lakh deposit from the marketing board early this year. The branch financed Mayne to the tune of Rs 75,000 to set up a small-scale animal feed production unit which was later found to be bogus;
- various branches of the Corporation Bank in the state were provided government deposits worth nearly Rs 1 crore. The bank, in turn, gave loans to the tune of Rs 17 lakh for the purchase of 10 second-hand trucks and the establishment of some small-scale industries.

The banks fell for the Mayne bait mainly because they are badly starved of deposits. Said one bank manager: "In cases where we gave loans for small-scale industries, we found that the machinery in the industrial units concerned had disappeared. Also that the proforma invoices for quotations which were shown to us for getting loans were actually from the loanees' own companies."

Robin Mayne, who has been a building contractor, small-scale industrialist, import-export agent, and now truck operator, denies the allegations vehemently and explains "My friends and I own 36 lorries. But some of them are in workshops, under repair, and others are doing the rounds. How can I produce all the trucks at the same time? Assuming that I am a cheat, how can bank managers be absolved of the responsibility of having sanctioned and disbursed these loans?"

He has a point. At least one bank—Dena Bank—dismissed its Nungambakkam branch manager for having advanced a Rs 3 lakh loan to a Mayne "friend" in 1980-81 to set up some small-scale industries. Observed a bank official: "The bank managers had no business to indiscriminately give away these loans. They gave away the loans without any collateral securities or other precautions."

The nationalised banks, in a memorandum drafted for the chief minister, last fortnight raised the pertinent question as to how Mayne and his people could "play" with the Agricultural Marketing Board funds and shift deposits from one bank to another. Without mentioning Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu by name, the memorandum harps on the political connections of Mayne. Neither Kalimuthu nor Kavignar Ponmuthuramalingam, AIADMK member and chairman of the board, were available for comment.

Mayne's influence and clout are apparent not in his access to the board funds alone. On a private complaint of cheating and fraud filed before the 14th metropolitan magistrate here by the Nungambakkam branch of Dena Bank on the loans secured by Mayne's people from the branch, the court directed the city police commissioner, way back in December 1982, to investigate. But obviously little has happened since.

There are wheels within wheels and if it is proved that the lorry registration certificates produced by Mayne's men are fake, the regional transport officers will also have a lot to answer for. The ramifications are endless, and promise to become a *cause célèbre* when further investigations untangle the threads.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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KNANAYA JACOBITES

Holy War

MOST parishioners of the minority Knanaya Jacobite sect in the rubber region of Ranni, 40 km from Kottayam, make only one small request—that they be allowed to pray. Their leader Bishop Mar Clemis has, however, other things on his mind. Seeking sole and absolute power—spiritual, ecclesiastical and temporal—over the administration of the Ranni Valiapally (Great Church) and all its properties, Clemis has been embroiled in a running battle with opponent parishioners for the past 14 years. The friction flared into an unholy clash on May 18 this year when the bishop, accompanied by gun-totting supporters tried to hold talks with parishioners inside the Valiapally. The fact that he had just recently tried to amend the constitution of the church didn't make him popular with the parishioners who are seeking to contain his overweening ambition. When he tried to speak, his flock drowned his voice with hymns—others just shouted him down. Says the local Sub-Inspector of Police, Varadan: "Choice filth was hurled at the bishop and the church was virtually turned into a battlefield." The church, and three of its chapels had to be closed down, driving some parishioners into the folds of the Pentecostals and the Church of South India.

Parishioners led by rubber tycoon M.K. Abraham are fighting the 67-year-old bishop to reopen the church and chapels and for control over the St Thomas College where appointments and admissions can cost a pretty penny. Countered Clemis: "The problem is confined to Ranni. It is a personal fight between me and M.K. Abraham that has snowballed into a major controversy. I will shortly issue a bull by which all these people will be excommunicated."

It is hardly a personal clash. At stake is the control of church property—worth Rs 1.25 crore in Ranni alone. And if the bishop is backed by a couple of families in Ranni, the majority of the parishioners support Abraham. The clash over the issue provoked the collector of Pathanamthitta to close the churches. And, with the CRPF guarding the shrines, all activities —including the conduct of marriages and baptisms—have come to a standstill.

In a state where religious leaders are known to carry big clout in political circles, Clemis has applied pressure on Home Minister Vayalar Ravi to intervene. Said an exasperated Ravi: "This is one issue where I am helpless because if I reopen the church it will be a law and order problem at Ranni. On the other hand, the bishop refuses to compromise." The bishop, for his part, feels Ravi is unduly partial to Abraham and company, who went to court in November 1981, on this issue. The high court judgement not only rejected Clemis' contention, it confirmed the ownership of the educational institutions under Ranni Valiapally by the parishioners.

Disregarding the court verdict, Clemis retorted: "My people have faith in me, that is a bigger judgement." Indeed, as Abraham pointed out, the parishioners only object to the bishop's interference in the management of parish properties, particularly St Thomas College. "Our bishop is more a businessman than a religious head," declared Abraham disgustedly.

The Knanaya Jacobite clergy too is divided in its opinion. The principal of the college, Reverend Father A.P. Thomas stated unequivocally, "Our bishop is a total autocrat. The priests who are opposed to him are transferred to remote churches while his favourites are given lucrative postings in rich churches." A Christian intellectuals' organisation, the Kerala Catholic Almaya Association (KCAA), which is spearheading the movement against bishops and their coteries and wants temporal matters of the church to be decided by the laity, is strongly opposed to Mar Clemis. Its secretary, Joseph Pulikunnel, pioneer translator of the Bible into Malayalam, pointed out: "The Ranni Valiapally issue is an eye-opener to all the Christians in India, which shows that the laity in India have no part in the church administration."

Although the KCAA is organising roadside meetings all through the Christian belt calling for reforms in the church, there is no real possibility of change in the near future. As Abraham explained: "The stalemate will continue since our church constitution does not have provisions for impeachment nor is there any mention of a retiring age for bishops."

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Cochin Port Trust, Babu Paul, is now trying to mediate. Liked and trusted by both the sides, Paul has received orders from the Patriarch of the Antioch (once head of the Syrian Church in Kerala which later spawned splinter groups, some still owing allegiance to him) to thrash out a settlement. "I am trying to my best for an amicable settlement between the warring groups and definitely before Christmas. I want the churches to be reopened," said Paul. If he succeeds, the now silent bells will once more peal joyfully to summon the faithful to prayer. But it is still too early to say for whom they will eventually toll.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Ranni

MUSHTAQ AHMED



Policemen guarding the Ranni Valiapally



Mar Clemis



Abraham

Parishioners led by M.K. Abraham are fighting Bishop Mar Clemis for control of the church property—worth Rs 1.25 crore in Ranni alone.

CHARAN SINGH

"Indira is a Liar"

IN 1970, soon after the first Congress split and immediately before Charan Singh became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for the second term after switching sides thrice over in three days, Chandra Bhanu Gupta, the Congress(O) leader, wrote to him: "Pantji (Govind Ballab Pant) made you his parliamentary secretary. I know how loyal you were to him. Dr Sampurnanand gave you the status of a full-fledged minister. I know your loyalty to him. I know how much I can depend on your loyalty." It was left to Raj Narain at that time to call him 'Chair Singh'. A sobriquet that has stood the test of time. And the memory of his betrayal in 1979, when he became prime minister with Congress(I) support after stabbing the Janata in the back, still rankles.

But the assorted opposition leaders, most of whom share Gupta's view of Charan Singh and dread his skill at 'double-negotiation' and his lust for 'chair', are being bullied into accepting him and his personal fief, the Lok Dal, as the fulcrum of resistance against the Congress(I) all over northern India.

So far, the Janata Party, Congress(S), Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of H.N. Bahuguna and Janavadi Party of Chandrajit Yadav have held out against the pressure mounted on them by Charan Singh to surrender their identities and get merged in "one party" with "one leader, one flag, one manifesto". But, they may ultimately have to fall in line, because Charan Singh, at 82 but still in the pink of health, continues to wield substantial support among the region's hierarchically 'backward' but landowning castes —Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs—covered under the indigenous acronym, Ajgar.

Charan Singh's constituency is the scattered ranks of independent farmers, low along the caste ladder but richer than their sharecropper and landless labourer counterparts, who, like the coils of Ajgar (which in Hindustani means the python), lie all along Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. And he has nursed this sprawling constituency like no other opposition leader has. Last fortnight, he was out on his trail every day, often covering 400 km in a hired air-conditioned Toyota to come back to his Tughlaq Road residence in New Delhi at night.

His convoy gains in length along the way, being joined by local Lok Dal leaders in their cars, tractors, Matador vans, motorbikes, even cycles. Welcome arches are put up not only in main towns but often at nowhere places along the highway, with tractors lining the road, and beaming peasant wives waiting to garland him amid shouts of "desh ka neta Charan Singh". Says Molayem Singh Yadav, Uttar Pradesh Lok Dal chief: "If you travel a hundred kilometres with Chaudhary saheb, there will be no space left in the Toyota to keep flowers and garlands."

Age has wrinkled his eyes into a permanently suspicious squint. His voice is feeble and flat, betraying no emotion. His speeches are devoid of rhetoric but they bristle with statistics—all tailored to hammer the point that politicians in India, who are city-bred, have cheated the farmers in particular and the rural people in general. Last fortnight, Principal Correspondent SUMIT MITRA *accompanied him on a trip to Aligarh in western Uttar Pradesh and spoke to him at length. Excerpts:*



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Q. When you suggested that there should be "one party" of the Opposition, what was uppermost in your mind?

A. If there is not one party and still we win the elections, like we did in 1977, then there is every likelihood that we will disintegrate, as we did then. This is the greatest danger and all opposition leaders should understand it. This time when Sharad (Pawar) came to see me with certain definite proposals for unity, he had the sanction of this man—Mr Chandra Shekhar. Now this man has almost abused me. He says formation of one party is neither politically expedient nor morally correct.

Q. Is it Chandra Shekhar who is saying this?

A. No. Most politicians do not know the problems, how have they arisen, or what is the possible solution. They are going merely by slogans. Nobody feels for the poor masses. And the pace has been set by the Congress leadership—Mr Nehru first, and then his daughter.

Q. Do you believe that the Congress(I) is fast losing ground all over the country?

A. I believe it more than anybody else. But what should we do now? If we fight Indira individually rather than unitedly then chances are that she may not get the majority but yet be the leader of the single largest party. And then the President may call her to form government.

Q. So what? If Mrs Gandhi leads a minority government you can defeat her on the floor of the Parliament.

A. Then there will be chaos...only chaos. The country then will advance further towards disintegration. But I don't understand why the concept of one party is not acceptable to Mr Chandra Shekhar. I don't want the future prime minister—if the united party wins, that is—to be named now. That is not my stand. I want the prime minister to be elected by the MP's.

Q. But nobody, not even the Bharatiya Janata Patry (BJP), your partner in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), has heeded your suggestion.

A. Yes. The BJP is even going in for adjustments with the Janata. I know that.

Q. How has the NDA functioned?

A. It exists only on paper. But don't ask me more on the subject. I can only briefly say that their voters don't vote for Lok Dal, they vote for BJP. And where there is no BJP candidate, they vote for Janata, even Indira. The BJP people did not vote for Lok Dal in the by-elections in Sonepat as well as Bijnor and Bandshahr.

Q. After the Andhra Pradesh episode, some people have started projecting N.T. Rama Rao as a person who can possibly lead the entire Opposition. What do you say?

A. I don't want to say anything, but I know who are projecting him. You better ask this question to Atal Behari Vajpayee. He can tell you why N.T. Rama Rao is being projected.

Q. Do you still feel there is a general sympathy against you—a champion of the rural populace—as a possible prime minister?

A. Yes, there is. And I am still searching for the answer. I am interested in the answer. I am concerned.

Q. Morarji Desai has said in a recent interview that he will have no problems working with you. Any comment?

A. I have not read it. I don't read his statements. He has no love for the masses. It was for the first time after Independence that farmers in 1977 had to burn down their standing sugarcane crop because Morarji refused them permission to export sugar. He represents vested interests.

Q. Mrs Gandhi's likely election theme will be that the unity of India is in danger and she alone can safeguard it. What is your answer?

A. Indira is a liar. It is her father who started encouraging the divisive forces, and now she is doing the same thing. I told her the same thing when she called me for a talk on Punjab. It is Nehru and Indira who are responsible for the threat of India's disintegration, and I am going to make it the main plank of our election campaign.

Q. If you become the prime minister of India in another three months, what major policy changes would you carry out?

A. There are various things, but two of them occupy important position. They are inequality of wealth and unemployment. I'll not allow those industries to come up which manufacture goods that can be

> **"It is Nehru and Indira who are responsible for the threat of India's disintegration, and I am going to make it the main plank of our election campaign."**

manufactured by human hand or in the small sector. In both large and small sectors, I'll not allow mechanical production of goods that can be produced by hand. That's the most awesome problem today-...the problem that hands are lying idle. I'm opposed to big industry because it eliminates labour.

Q. But an estimated Rs 40,000 crore is riding on the shoulders of the big industry. What will happen to that?

A. I've anticipated your question. Take the textile industry, for instance, which is the largest in the country. It employs 14 lakh workers, but the same amount of goods that it produces would have employed 180 lakh workers had we only used handlooms and spinning mills. I don't want to shut down the existing big industry. They are free to export, but they will not be allowed to sell their goods in the domestic market.

Q. Do you want to protect the entire domestic market against the mechanised sector?

A. Yes. That alone can solve our problem. Against the 85 lakh population of Bombay there are 45 lakh who live and sleep on the streets. Who are they? They flock towards the cities from the villages because of lack of employment.

Q. What will your international policy be?

A. I am against drastic policy reversals in international affairs. But there is a general feeling that we are surrounded by hostile neighbours. You have Pakistan on the west, Bangladesh on the east, even tiny Sri Lanka on the south and mighty China on the north. But, I ask, who created this situation? It is the creation of Nehru and Indira. Nehru gave away Tibet to China on a platter and that was the beginning of India's weakening position in the subcontinent. And Indira has continued it. She is unable to sort out the Tamil problem even with Lanka.

Q. What are your views regarding the two superpowers?

A. If I were the prime minister in 1947, I'd have made friends with America, but now things have undergone such a great change that we cannot give up our friendship with the Soviet Union. I believe that distant countries can never be hostile, and America is more distant from us than Russia.

Q. Vietnam was no nearer to America!

A. But then a section of the people in Vietnam themselves invited the American forces. The Americans came in to check the Chinese and the Russian communists.

Q. I see you don't like the communists. But at home you hope to have seat adjustments with the two communist parties.

A. Yes. Their philosophy is very close to mine. I am against income disparity, and so are they.

Q. Are you in favour of changing the existing Constitution?

A. I am in favour of the presidential system as it exists in the United States. I want direct election of the president and direct elections of the governors in states. That is the system admitting the least corruption because the president cannot be removed by any no-confidence motion. The President cannot be served with a no-confidence motion unless there are charges of treason or corruption. This will eliminate horse-trading in MLA's and MP's and all such banes in our public life. The system has worked perfectly in America for 200 years and no president was removed except Nixon.

Q. In a straight contest with Mrs Gandhi under a presidential system, is there anyone who can take her on?

A. The time has not yet come to answer your question.

AHMEDABAD REMAND HOME

Criminal Callousness

AHMEDABAD is a city well populated with social workers and organisations meant for the uplift of various sections of society. Yet, right under their sensitive noses, is a Remand Home for children that resembles something out of Charles Dickens. Correspondent RAMESH MENON *smuggled himself into the home recently to investigate charges of criminal neglect on the part of the officials responsible for running the home. His report:*

THE GRAFFITI on the walls of Ahmedabad's Remand Home are eloquent and philosophical expressions of the values and assets that children are meant to represent. For the inmates of the home, however, the slogans are nothing but a grim parody of their lives. Remand homes are established to reform delinquent children and give them a new hope and meaning in life. In Ahmedabad, what is actually taking place behind the grim walls is quite the opposite. Examples:

► Momin Ali, 16, left his native Garhwal when his father died, leaving the 13-year-old boy the responsibility of supporting his blind and ailing mother. After failing to find work in Delhi, Momin went to Ahmedabad where he polished shoes for a living at the railway station. He was picked up one night by officials of the Remand Home who, ignoring his protestations, bundled him into a van and dumped him in the home. Today, with tears welling in his eyes, he pleads: "Why have I been put into this jail. I am not a thief. I was honourably working as a shoeshine boy."

► Dhakudo, a six-year-old boy from Pithvadi village in the Sabarkundla district of Gujarat, quivers constantly with fear and begs every visitor he meets to take him out of the home, often breaking into uncontrollable sobs. "Just get me out of this place. I'll find my way to my home," he pleads. Dhakudo was searching for his elder brother at the Ahmedabad station when Remand Home officials swooped on him and carted him off.

► Raju Ramchandra, 10, from Aligarh ran away from home to escape the brutality of his stepfather only to find himself in a worse situation at the Remand Home. The last nine months in the home have made him angry and bitter. "I will run away as soon as I can," he says defiantly.

Currently, the home has about 70 children who, as in the above instances, were picked up at random merely because they were loitering and not because they are criminals. Most are between the ages of six and 16 (only 30 of the children in the home have been engaged in criminal acts) yet, their treatment is far worse than that

> **Remand homes are established to reform delinquent children and give them a new hope in life. In Ahmedabad, what is actually taking place behind the grim walls is quite the opposite.**

RAMESH MENON



given to prisoners in jails.

SUPERINTENDENT of the home, C.C. Shah, casually admits: "There are children here who were picked up at the station and other places as they were found doing odd jobs. At this young age, they must have comforts. So we brought them here." He also admits that many of the children were picked up to fill the self-imposed quota of the home. Says he: "When the number of inmates falls, we go on raids mainly to the station and bus stands to catch stray children." Despite the fact that a majority of the children are innocent victims, they are all treated like criminals. Says Dinesh Rawal, secretary of the Zilla Bal Surakshan Mandal, a social organisation that runs the home: "There is no use trying to reform these thieves. If we do not keep a strict eye on them, they will sell everything in the home and run away." With that kind of callousness that clearly goes against the objectives of the home, it is hardly surprising that for the minors huddled together in shared misery, their lives are a nightmare that never seems to end.

Life in the home alternates between suffering and loneliness. The only kind words they hear are from an occasional visitor or social worker who drops in. They are made to work like slaves even though they are not supposed to. The insensitivity of the officials to their plight is scandalous. Ashok Panchal, 16, swallowed insecticide twice in a bid to commit suicide to avoid the humiliation.

Life in the Remand Home starts at the crack of dawn when the inmates are made to sweep and scrub the floors and wash clothes or work in the kitchen. Those who shirk are beaten. Says Dharmesh Purshottam Das, 16: "What is the use of keeping us here like this? If we were taught some trade at least it would come in use."

The interior of the home consists of a hall and two classrooms. The walls are damp and peeling and the kitchen is filthy. Not that it is much in use. Inmates complain that they are virtually starved and whatever food they get is unpalatable. Last fortnight, in the presence of a group of social workers, a five-year-old boy nervously approached Superintendent Shah and begged him for some food as he was starving. Shah curtly told the child to stop making a fuss. Says Ashok Panchal: "We do not mind the filthy work we have to do. But at least we must get enough to eat." Adds Satish Chauhan, 15: "Some of us have done wrong but keeping us hungry is the worst punishment anybody can mete out to people like us."

Even worse is the callousness towards the sick. Officials say that they stopped daily ration of a glass of milk for the inmates because it could carry jaundice germs, yet sick children are uncared for. In one corner of the room, a teen-aged inmate lay shivering in a tattered blanket, suffering from flu. Nobody took any notice while the empty slogans stared down from the walls, a mocking daily reminder that the nightmare is never going to end.

Even worse is the callousness towards the sick. They are uncared for. In one corner of the room a teen-aged inmate lay shivering in a tattered blanket, suffering from flu. Nobody took any notice.

RAKESH MEHROTRA



MADHYA PRADESH

Breaking the Bonds

WITH a hectic harvesting season looming large, the thought of having to deal with farm labour problems would be enough to give any government sleepless nights. Indeed for the Madhya Pradesh Government the coming months do not promise to be very happy: a recent Supreme Court order on bonded labour in the state could change completely the power structure in thousands of villages.

Having ruled that 693 Kamias (traditional agricultural workers) were indeed bonded labourers, Justices P.N. Bhagwati and Ranganath Misra may have created a situation in which lakhs of Kamias in the region may have to be freed and rehabilitated. Raipur district alone has about 200,000 Kamias and their rehabilitation would cost the Government about Rs 80 crore. Officials are too stunned to even contemplate the situation in another half a dozen Chhattisgarh districts.

The administration's concern is more than just financial. As the news spreads, thousands of Kamias can be expected to organise and demand freedom from bondage and then rehabilitation. This will bring them, sooner or later, in direct confrontation with the landlords who hire them. For the Government, that does not promise to be a pleasant scenario.

The lengthy 297-word definition of "bonded labour system" under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 has been a source of constant debate and confusion. While it specifies several conditions to identify a person as a bonded labourer, in the existing case the definition includes a labourer who, for an advance from the farmer, agrees to work for less than the minimum wage specified under law. Section 2(b) of the Act lists 31 traditional categories of forced labour all over the country in which an agreement between debtor and creditor is ordinarily presumed. The judges have said: "There is a statutorily raised presumption that Kamias are bonded labourers and the burden of showing that they are not would be on the landlords/creditors."

The issue was first raised by the petitioners, the Chhattisgarh Krishak Mazdoor Sangh, in February 1983, when the Sangh submitted a list of 488 Kamias to the district collector at Raipur. The Director General (Labour Welfare), Lakshmidhar Mishra, was also approached in Delhi. He repeatedly asked the labour secretary of Madhya Pradesh to look into the matter but no action was taken.

A recent Supreme Court order on bonded labour may have far reaching consequences and could change the power structure in thousands of villages.

The collector deputed an additional tehsildar to conduct an inquiry: none of the persons listed were bonded labourers, he concluded. The reminders and denials went on and the Sangh, realising it was getting nowhere finally filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court seeking intervention to free and rehabilitate the labourers.

The court, subsequently, asked Navin Chandra and Ashok Khandelwal of the National Labour Institute at New Delhi to conduct a field inquiry as court commissioners. They observed: "There cannot be a more live instance of the indifferent and perfunctory manner of identifying bonded labourers...the administration denies their human legitimate claim without having looked into the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, the only authentic official document for the purpose. This is a really unfortunate situation, whatever may be the reasons behind it, lack of sensitivity or pressure of vested interests...."

Chandra and Khandelwal, who had been asked to interview the Kamias in the absence of officials and farmers, were also subject to an eye-opener when Jaidev Satpathy, a former legislator and a substantial farmer of the area, turned up at their rest-house in Saraipalli and questioned their method of inquiry. He said he would soon teach the secretary of the Krishak Mazdoor Sangh, Hoop Ram Gwal, a lesson. Next morning he came again and wanted to know what they could do if he forced his presence at the time of the inquiry. The commissioners said: "This was clear writing on the wall as to what weapons the landlords of the area were going to use first to harass members of the Chhattisgarh Krishak Mazdoor Sangh." The two concluded that the Kamias they interviewed would without doubt classify as bonded labourers.





Barrik (second from right) with Kamias; and Gwal (centre): radical changes

The landlords had, in fact, started taking notice of the Sangh activities when it started drawing up lists of Kamias in neighbouring villages. In February and March 1984 it complained to the Supreme Court of harassment by the official machinery. The court first ordered protection of the petitioners and then, on March 30, 1984, journalist Ghanshyam Pardesi was appointed as court commissioner to inquire into the matter. The findings were that in at least three different instances Sangh workers had been arrested on various flimsy charges. Pardesi noted: "We must accept the fact that the district administration had not liked the filing of the writ petition and the subsequent orders of the Supreme court which were likely to disturb the status quo of the region."

The state Government, which had earlier denied that Kamias were bonded labourers, did a volte-face recently when it woke up to earlier Supreme Court judgements, and district administration officials are now engaged in a desperate race to rehabilitate the 693 Kamias.

Simultaneously, some landlords, baffled and nervous of what to them is a new law, have started sacking Kamias to avoid trouble. Numerous Kamias may find themselves jobless if the farmers decide to recruit Melhas, casual agricultural labourers who are paid twice the rate of Kamias. The Sangh, however, is counting on unity among the Kamias and Melhas.

Under the current government scheme a Kamia, whose annual income at present works out to about Rs 2,000 a year as against a wage entitlement of Rs 3,139 per year and hardly enough to enable him to pay off the initial loan advanced by the landlord), is given a package grant in kind — goats, cows etc worth Rs 4,000. The Sangh, however, is convinced that the ultimate solution lies in giving agricultural land to the landless.

The court case is far from over and even as Justices Bhagwati and Misra have suggested the Madhya Pradesh High Court should nominate a judicial officer to again go into cases of harassment of the petitioners, the Sangh has sent a list of another 2,000 Kamias who it claims are bonded labourers.

The Sangh strategy clearly is to seek the court's intervention as far as possible since it feels it cannot rely on the administration. The Government, on the other hand, will certainly underplay the magnitude of the problem and contest every list of Kamias that the Sangh submits to the court. More important, however, is the severe strain it promises to impose on the social fabric of rural Madhya Pradesh.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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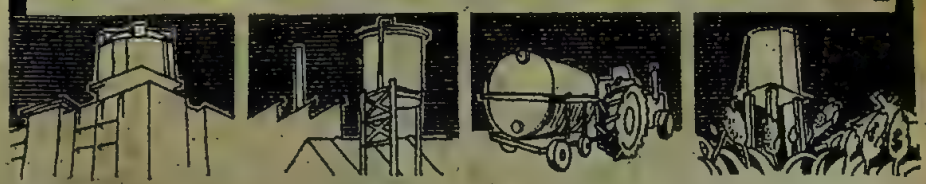
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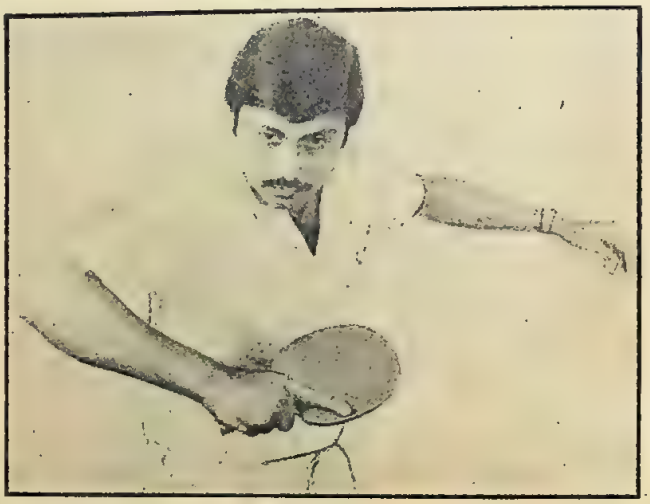
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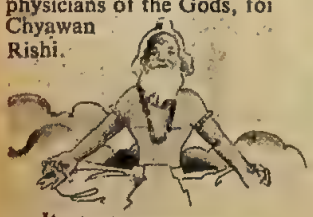
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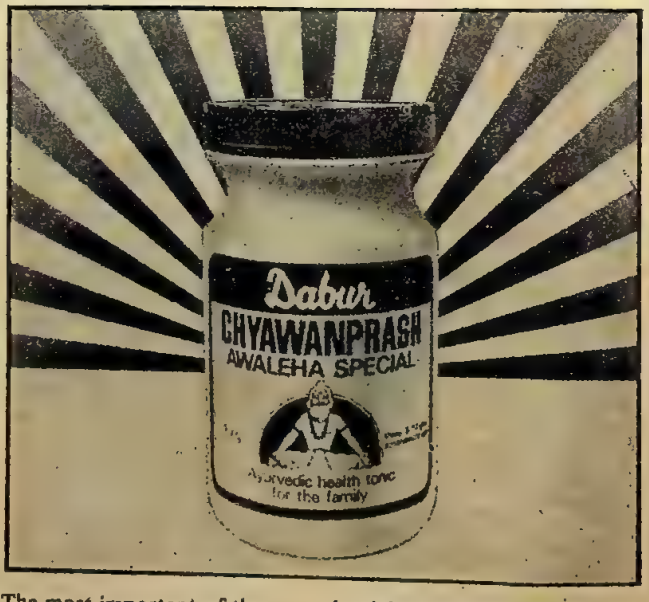


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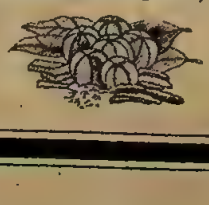
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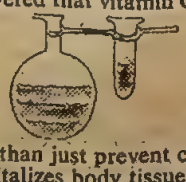
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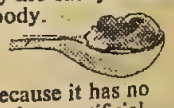


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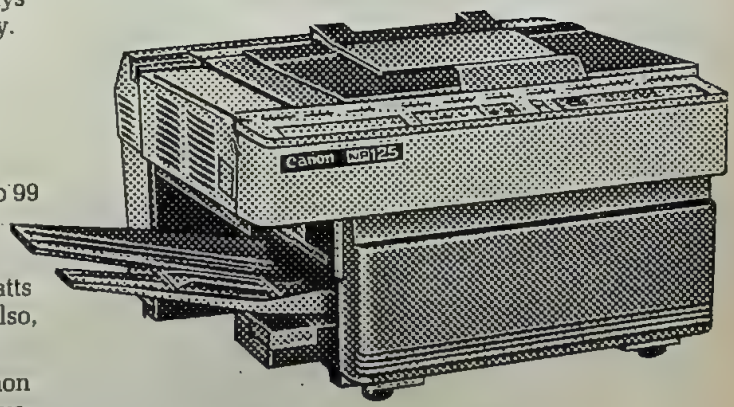
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COMPUTER AGE

THE GOVERNMENT is planning to liberalise its policy on mini-computers, probably along the lines of its unrestricted licensing policy for micro-computers. The details are still being worked out, and an announcement is expected shortly. However, the Department of Electronics' proposal to reduce the duties on a variety of electronics components, mainly as a measure of rationalisation, has got stuck in the Finance Ministry, which is yet to clear the package of proposals presented some months ago. Similarly, a parallel proposal to create an Electronic Components Development Fund (ECDF) that will provide concessional finance to component manufacturers has also made little headway so far.

LEASING LOSS

A NUMBER of banks which were planning to get into the leasing business will now have to re-think their plans following the Reserve Bank of India's directive stating that the banks can undertake leasing activity only through subsidiary companies (in which the banks have at least 51 per cent shareholding). This puts a spoke in the wheel for the State Bank of India, Bank of India, Chartered Bank and other banking companies, all of which were planning to set up leasing companies in partnership with bodies like the International Finance Corporation of Washington and domestic companies like Twentieth Century Finance, and corporate groups like TVS and Muthiah Chettiar. In all these cases, the banks would have held less than 51 per cent of the new companies' equity, which according to the new RBI directive is not permissible.

CONDITIONAL IMPASSE

NEGOTIATIONS are on between India and the United States to sort out the problems relating to the supply of high technology goods by US companies. American diplomats say that a new arrangement might be worked out soon under which the US Government will not stand in the way of high technology exports from the US to India, but Indian officials argue that the American conditions for this are unacceptable. One condition is that India should not re-export the high technology goods that it acquires from the US. This is not a problem because India has not been re-exporting in the past either. But a second American condition stipulates that Indian buyers of goods like computers must restrict themselves to some end-uses and not others. Government officials say this is an unacceptable condition.

GROWING PAINS

THE ABSURDITY of multi-crore companies continuing to claim the status of small-scale industrial units is about to end in the field of TV set manufacture. A small-scale unit is defined as one which has an investment in plant and machinery worth less than Rs 20 lakh, and giants like Weston Electroniks fell into this category despite having an annual turnover of over Rs 50 crore. Weston has finally crossed the Rs 20 lakh limit, as has one unit of the Dyanora group. The loss of small-scale status means that these companies now come under the purview of the Government's industrial licensing policy, and that they must quickly change their debt-equity ratio to more stringent standards.

INCENTIVE INCREASE

THE COMMITTEE appointed earlier this year to work out changes required in the country's export strategy is likely to recommend a package of measures that will liberalise foreign trade policy still further. Contrary to some speculation earlier that the committee might decide to backtrack on the liberalisation policy followed so far (because of the larger trade deficit that this has resulted in), the panel is considering a series of suggestions that it has received for offering more incentives and facilities to exporters.

Among the suggestions which the committee is considering is one to identify and demarcate whole sectors of industry which have a high export-growth potential, like leather goods, and to then extend to such sectors all the facilities and incentives required to help them achieve rapid growth of exports. The logic of this suggestion is that exports can only grow on a healthy, modern and competitive domestic base. This is one step beyond the existing practice of denoting individual enterprises in an industry (and not the whole industry itself) as export-oriented, and will therefore have far-reaching implications for the entire economy.

TIMES OF STRESS

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



COMPANY profits appear to have come under some strain last year. An analysis of the finances of 100 selected companies, by *Business Standard*, shows that profits both before and after tax dropped last year by 1.3 per cent and 4.5 per cent, respectively. The industry groups that performed particularly poorly were aluminium, chemical fertiliser, paper, electrical goods, tyres and tubes and automobiles. The ones that did well were tea plantations, tobacco and (surprisingly) cotton textiles. These were also the only groups to record an increase in the ratio of profits to assets. Despite the lower profits, most of the companies decided to pay out higher dividends, which rose by 15.1 per cent for all 100 companies. Only three groups (aluminium, paper and electrical goods) paid out lower dividends.

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POONAM GIDWANI

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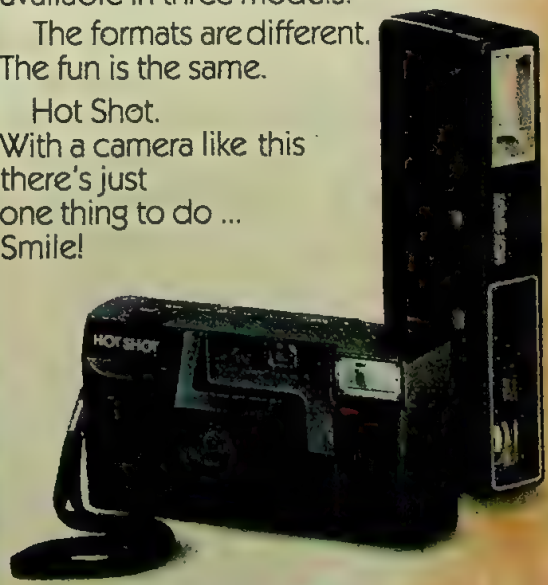
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The Dollar Fever



TO HIM who hath shall be given and since no one hath more than the US, the richest country in the world, it is not surprising that the dollar should go on from strength to strength. The dollar broke through the Rs 12 barrier last week and the pound sterling went down to Rs 14.70. At the rate the rupee is sinking, it may be worth no more than 7 US cents in a year from now. Four years ago, it was worth 12 US cents. The official policy seems to be to let the rupee slide in relation to the dollar while holding it against sterling. But the sterling is now one of the weakest currencies of the world: the pound used to fetch $ 1.5 a year ago; it now fetches no more than 1.26, a devaluation of more than 16 per cent in a year. Most of us have forgotten the official exchange rate: $2.4 to the pound. There is speculation that the dollar and the pound will soon be on a par, may be in a year from now, and the Reserve Bank will have to do some quick thinking to retrieve the rupee from the clutches of the sinking sterling.

Why is the dollar so strong? There are many theories, one of which is that US interest rates are so high that their comelier look attracts other currencies. High interest rates have attracted billions of dollars worth of foreign currency to the US in speculative flows, and also from places like Hong Kong and the Philippines where there is political uncertainty. But this is certainly not the main reason. We tend to forget that the US dollar is strong because the US economy is strong. It is now, for its size, the strongest economy in the world, stronger than any in Europe and nearly as strong as the Japanese.

There are also other aspects. The US has become one of the largest borrowers of foreign capital, so large that last year alone, it took in more than Rs 100,000 crore of foreign investment, more than two-thirds of our gross national product. This is a small percentage of its national income, no more than about 3 per cent, but it is enough to drive the world's money markets crazy. But the main point to note is that the US economy is able to absorb so much foreign capital without a perceptible fall in the interest rates which remain high. The fact that the interest rates have not come down indicates that the US economy has a tremendous capacity for growth. Incidentally, the inflation rate in the United States is now half that in India and is expected to go down further in the coming months.

President Reagan's Administration is not apparently content with the present surge in the economy and is going out of its way to attract more funds in a bid to bridge its yawning budget deficit which is expected to touch Rs 250,000 crore this year. Under a new tax bill signed by Reagan in July, foreigners who buy US



bonds and securities will not have to pay any tax on interest or dividends. This used to be as high as 30 per cent. The new bill ends the tax, making investments tax-free to overseas buyers. America has now become the largest and possibly the most attractive tax haven in the world, for non-US investors, that is.

But this is apparently only the beginning. In addition to making US securities tax-free to foreigners, the treasury is also considering issuing bearer bonds to foreigners, more or less on the same lines as our bearer bonds. The bonds can be bought anonymously, no questions asked, and interest on the bonds will be paid through coupons attached to them, also no questions asked.

I have no doubt some bright chap in the North Block will come up with a similar idea before long for if the US Government has to go out of its way to attract what is undoubtedly tainted money, why shouldn't India do so? There are very good reasons why we shouldn't do so. Firstly, I have a feeling that the Government has all the money it can handle and if it is able to lay hands on more, it will just waste it on precisely the kind of projects—five-star hotels, colour TV etc—this country can do without at the moment. I have always maintained that this country is not short of resources; if it were, the projects in which these resources have been used would not be operating year after year at such a low level of efficiency. An economy with underutilised capital has no business going around for more capital, just as a company which doesn't know what to do with its idle machines has no business looking for more. It would merely add to costs and lead to inflation. As it is, the soaring production costs in public sector undertakings are a major factor in our inflation, and until these undertakings function efficiently, the Government would be well advised to stay its itchy hand.

A good case can, however, be made for financing development activities in the rural sector out of the funds of, say, non-resident Indians, precisely the kind of activities that lie fallow because of paucity of funds. In fact, I would go further and say that the funds should not be used in any activity managed by the Government for that would be the surest road to disaster. Apart from rural development projects, there are a number of specific activities for which such funds could be earmarked. There is, for instance, a proposal for an express highway between Ahmedabad and Baroda in Gujarat which has been hanging fire for a long time, and which would fill a pressing need of the fastest growing industrial region in the country. The last I heard about it was that the Centre has approached, or was about to approach, the World Bank for necessary funds. But why the World Bank? Surely there are enough wealthy Gujaratis working and residing outside Gujarat to invest in a facility that would not only be a commercially profitable venture but also in the long run help their own community.

I would suggest that the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce or some such body comes forward to undertake and manage the project by collecting funds through bonds sold to non-resident Indians in England and the US. The cost can be more than recovered through a toll, as they do in most countries in Europe. It is not really necessary for the Government to be always involved in everything that happens in the country. The Ahmedabad-Baroda expressway would be essentially a community project and it is best that it remains its responsibility right from the start. And I have no doubt that the Gujaratis on the spot will make a bigger success of the venture than some babus manipulating affairs from far away New Delhi.

DRUG INDUSTRY

Searching for a Cure

IT LOOKS liberal, recommends sizeable concessions and sets the stage for the most significant shift in official thinking on drugs policy in recent years. The report of the steering committee of the National Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Development Council now working its way through the Government machinery, is set to form the plank of a drastically revised policy for the controversial drug industry. As a council member says: "A new policy can emerge before the elections if Sathe and his cabinet colleagues are keen on it. And Sathe certainly is."

The steering committee's report recommends:

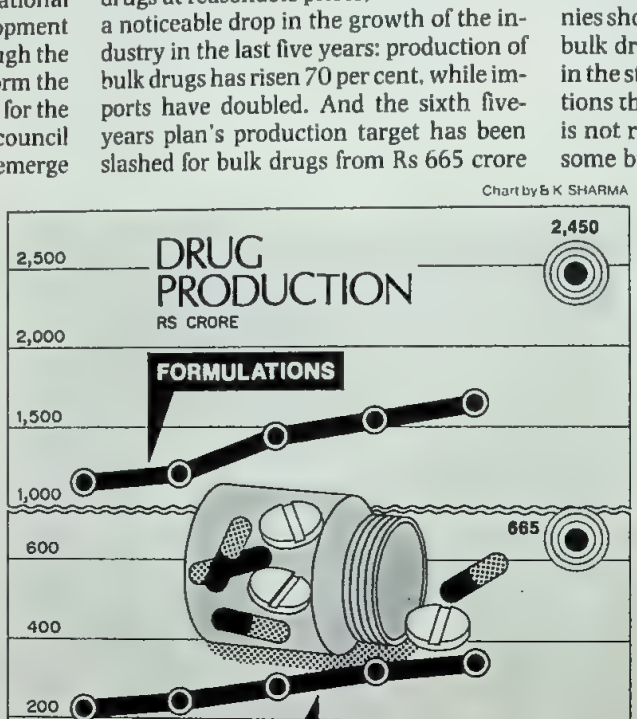
- Price controls for only 95 drugs, the remaining 265 drugs now on the price control list going off it;
- Higher "mark-ups" (which include trade margins, promotional costs and profits for the manufacturer) on the production cost;
- An end to the present ceiling on company profits, though opinions were sharply divided on this;
- Liberalised, if not completely free, licensing for priority "bulk" drugs (which constitute the basic product from which different downstream manufacturers make their formulations);
- Automatic price increases every year based on a price index mechanism;
- A stipulation that one-fifth of every manufacturer's total production should comprise essential drugs;
- The regularisation of excess production capacities installed, though hemmed in by conditions in the case of companies that have more than 40 per cent foreign shareholding;
- And no price control for five years on any drug introduced into the country for the first time.

Most of these signal radical departures from the present policy stances; indeed, they are a reaction to what are generally seen as the negative results of the present drug policy, initiated in 1978. Few of this policy's many objectives (drug availablity at reasonable prices, Indianising the industry, a leadership role for the public sector, self-reliance in drug technology, and so on) have been achieved. Instead, recent trends have suggested that the policy was becoming counter-productive.

Far from ensuring a plentiful supply of drugs at reasonable prices, there has been a noticeable drop in the growth of the industry in the last five years: production of bulk drugs has risen 70 per cent, while imports have doubled. And the sixth five-years plan's production target has been slashed for bulk drugs from Rs 665 crore to Rs 500 crore, while that for formulations has been reduced from Rs 2,450 crore to Rs 1,950 crore. It is doubtful whether even these reduced targets will be reached, and the industry talks of shortage developing for such essential drugs as Rifampicin (for treating tuberculosis), antibiotics like Chloramphenicol and Streptomycin, and Vitamin A. The government disputes this hotly, and an official said: "The industry imported 75 tonnes of Rifampicin last year, against the normal 40 tonnes. What has happened to the extra 35 tonnes? Where's the shortage?"

Nevertheless, there is no getting away from the fact that a number of drug companies have moved away from the production of essential drugs (which are allowed a lower price mark-up under the 1978 policy) and concentrated on other products that are free from price controls because they are non-essential. Despite loopholes in the price policy that have been exploited by the drug industry, the price index for pharmaceutical products as a whole has tended to rise at only half the rate as prices in general. And a study of the industry by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), sponsored by the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI), reported earlier this year that pre-tax profits on formulations have tumbled, and that cost audits of 10 companies showed all of them incurring losses on bulk drug production. Most of the figures in the study are dated, the NCAER itself cautions that its sample of companies studied is not representative of the industry, and some bias may have crept in because the study was sponsored by the OPPI, but few will care to dispute the general finding that for many companies drug production was quite simply becoming financially unattractive—leading to the slowing down of both investment and production.

Chart by S K SHARMA



Not surprisingly, there had been increasing clamour for a review of policy. Drug companies wanted higher prices, claiming that those permitted by the Government are uneconomic. OPPI President George Daniel, who heads Hoechst, said: "The mark-ups are really unremunerative." Others pointed out that rising input costs are not offset quickly enough by government-notified price increases. And, in fact, an inter-ministerial committee had recommended two years ago that the 360 drugs on the price control list should be pruned by at least 100 on grounds of administrative inconvenience.

Against this backdrop, the substantial liberalisations suggested by the steering committee should have cheered the industry. Ironically, quite the contrary has taken place. H.F. Khorakiwala, president of the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA) and head of Wockhardt Pvt Ltd, said: "We are not very satisfied with it." And Nihchal Israni, chairman and managing director of Blue Cross Laboratories, added: "I don't think they have thought things out properly." Industry spokesmen use stronger language in private in roundly condemning the steering committee report as a "confused tangle" and as "a hodge-podge set of recommendations which will lead to a hodge-podge policy."

The new mark-ups that are proposed, they say, are not high enough, while

others add that the new list of drugs recommended for price control exclude many essential ones. Harish Chawla, resident director of Cipla in Delhi, points out that commonly used, if not life-saving drugs like Baralgan, antibiotics such as Doxycycline and Amoxicillin and anti-cancer drugs like Mitomycin, Adviamycin and Bleomycin find no place in the list. Adds a paediatrician: "The committee's list is outrageous. It omits hydrocortisone, one of the first drugs used in any life-saving procedure, includes only one diuretic even though different individuals may not respond to the same drug in the same way, has no drug for epilepsy, and excludes antibiotics like Kloxacillin and Gentamycin, commonly used in hospitals and often by poor patients."

Some of those who carp at the steering committee recommendations undoubtedly do so in the belief that they have not gone far enough down the liberalisation road. But those who swear by the radically-inclined report of the Hathi committee in 1975 (which formed the basis for the more diluted 1978 drug policy) feel the steering committee represents a betrayal of the spirit of the 1975 report. Chawla, for one, charges that the 1978 drug policy has been implemented half-heartedly, and cites Sathe's admission in the Rajya Sabha that 20 provisions of the last drug price control order have not been implemented. He also argues that the steering committee report seems to be meant to "regularise irregularities".

He may have a point there. The Government's record on implementing the 1978 policy dicta has been less than outstanding, as is suggested by the following facts:

► One of the criteria by which drug companies could retain majority foreign shareholding was the use of high technology. But the committee set up to decide what constituted high technology laid down guidelines that were virtually catch-all safety-nets, as a study by the Indian Institute of Public Administration has pointed out. And Chawla argues that the norms would fit a number of clearly low-technology drugs like Chlofibrate, Propranolol, Ethambutol, I6-DPA and vitamin E.

► In order to encourage the production of bulk drugs, the policy had provided for regularising excess production capacities in formulations provided the production ratio between bulk drugs and formulations stayed at 1:5 (1:10 for Indian companies). But the Government did not define how the value of bulk drug production was to be determined and companies used this to their advantage. An industry observer said, "Companies have been inflating bulk drug production figures to be eligible to produce more formulations, which are more profitable." Also, the 1:5 ratio for foreign drugs companies has not been reached in most cases, the average for this sector being around 1:11, signalling a clear failure on the part of official policy and objectives.

► The pricing policy itself has been ineffective, and the Government recently issued notices to some 50 drug companies for the recovery of "unintended" profits running into crores of rupees. From the excess profits on Rifampicin alone, the money recoverable is over Rs 3 crore, while excess profits have also been made on Alabuamol, Ampicillin, Amoxicillin, Trimethoprim and Sulphamethaxazole.

► Companies with significant foreign shareholdings have continued to make hefty profits on individual deals. German Remedies, for example, imported Dipyradimol (used to manufacture a heart drug) from a Spanish company at three times the price other companies were paying. And Burroughs Wellcome was selling Trimethoprim at more than double the price charged by the public sector Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. Sathe cleared German Remedies of the charge of transfer pricing while Burroughs Wellcome had not violated the official pricing policy, but this was cold comfort.

The 1979 price control order had exempted small-scale producers; but many foreign-owned drug giants as well as Indian companies have used this loophole to set up associate small-scale firms, with whom they then enter into marketing tie-ups. Among those that have done so are Roussel, Hoechst, German Remedies, Nicholas, Searle, Ethnor, Duphar, Franco-Indian, Unique Pharmaceutical Laboratories, Lyka Laboratories, Lupin Laboratories, Wockhardt, Standard Organics, Cadilla Laboratories and Aristo Pharmaceuticals.

Among industry practices that have made a mockery of the Government's regulatory efforts is the illegal expansion of production capacity, although Daniel of OPPI argues that, "You are penalising the people who can deliver the medicine. In six years, only seven out of 77 applications have been granted to foreign companies." And the Government has approved few applications from foreign companies for the regularisation of excess capacities.

The steering committee showed little concern with some of these issues, lending credence to Chawla's charge that it has done a whitewash job. In the meantime, the fur has been flying within the industry over entirely different issues. OPPI represents the foreign interest while IDMA is a lobby for wholly Indian-owned companies. Over the years, the Government has gradually forced most of the foreign companies to reduce their foreign shareholding to 40 per cent, while in some cases the companies have voluntarily diluted their overseas interest. In the process, under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA), these companies can now claim the status of fully Indian companies and exploit the advantages of this.

Alarmed at this, IDMA has been campaigning for the last one year on the ground that even companies that have diluted to 40 per cent remain foreign con-



"In the new policy, the mark-ups are really unremunerative."

GEORGE DANIEL
OPPI president



"We are not very satisfied with the liberalisations in the new policy."

H.F. KHORAKIWALA,
IDMA president



"Commonly used, if not life-saving drugs find no place in the list."

HARISH CHAWLA,
resident director, Cipla

trolled, and that the two groups should not be treated equally. Khorakiwala wrote to Mrs Gandhi last April, pointing out that "uncontrolled activities of companies with foreign equity will put a significant strain on the country's foreign exchange", and that in countries like the US and Canada, companies with 10 and 5 per cent foreign shareholdings were treated as foreign companies.

OPPI members have counter-lobbied with the argument that if a cosmetics company with 40 per cent overseas shares could be regarded as Indian, so could a drug company in the same position. And the two groups fought bitterly for vantage in the policy working groups that submitted reports last year to the NDPDC. The steering committee was appointed later to sort out the differences but most industry spokesmen feel that the attempted compromise is not satisfactory. IDMA, for instance, is clearly worried about a proposal to group the 95 essential drugs into two categories which would reduce some of the product mark-ups. These drugs, as it turns out, constitute over 60 per cent of the Indian sector's total production—or so an IDMA official claimed.

The situation last fortnight, consequently, was that industry lobbying continued for a liberalisation of drug policy simultaneously with sectoral lobbying for advantage within the drug industry. What would finally emerge, and when, remained unclear. Sathe has repeatedly stated that he is keen on pushing the new policy through before the Government's term; but the new policy will almost certainly mean an increase in the prices of a host of medicines, which the Government will like to avoid in the pre-election season. In this tug-of-war between the interests of consumers and that of Indian and foreign companies, the policy-makers might well work themselves to a standstill.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with JAGANNATH DUBASHI

INDUSTRIAL SAFETY

Safeguards

FOR AN industrial worker, the hand is probably the most important part of his body, the chief link between man and machine. But sometimes through sheer carelessness the machine can become an enemy. The tragedy is that it need not be this way. According to a study by two Pune doctors, over 97 per cent of all hand injuries occur because either the worker was careless or the working conditions were unsafe.

Doctors V.G. Vaidya and U.G. Naik of the Lokmanya Medical Foundation of Chinchwad arrived at that shocking estimate after researching the cases of 542 workers who had had their hands bruised, slashed or mangled at work. The workers were all from the highly industrialised Pimpri-Chinchwad belt. Every month about 700 to 800 industrial accidents are reported at the Lokmanya Hospital alone, of which nearly 300 are hand injuries. Says Vaidya: "We had so many people coming to us with crushed fingers and battered knuckles that we decided to find out how they were caused and suggest means to prevent them."

Finding out how they were caused was easy—and a pointer to how careless both workers and management often are. Alexander Pinto, a machinist at an engineering firm tried to stop a drill bit with his bare hands and had a ring finger sliced clean off—he spent 40 days in hospital. L.N. Dole has nearly 22 years of experience but was still careless enough to let both hands stray between two whirling rollers and collapsed with a scream with eight crushed fingers: plastic surgery helped to restore a fair degree of mobility. L.D. Wadkar, a fitter in a pump manufacturing firm did not put on his gloves—they are clumsy and restrict movement—and the long foil of hard steel his drill had chipped from the 'job' slashed his right middle finger to the bone.



A safety guard and (inset) an accident victim: new hope

More than four-fifth of the cases studied were in the engineering industry and over a quarter were of lowly helpers, who were "unskilled, untrained odd-job men... exposed to a wide variety of jobs without having any technical knowledge". Says Naik: "The time of the accidents was also significant. Most took place at the beginning of a shift, when the worker was overconfident, or at the end of a shift, when he was tired, and in a hurry to be home."

The foundation has begun a programme to educate workers, 20,000 of whom have already been shown an evocative audio-visual prepared by Vijay and Saroja Parulkar, who have drawn on hundreds of slides to demonstrate what safety is about.

Side by side the foundation is working with a firm to manufacture safety guards. Poona Pressings Pvt Ltd, a small-scale manufacturer (turnover: Rs 25 lakh) of engineering components has begun to market one such guard: a kind of bar which is attached to and synchronised with a press and swings in front of the working area every time the ram crashes down, ensuring that any lingering hand is kicked away. Says Managing Director, Anil Gupte: "We plan to sell about a hundred of these a month, and the response has been quite good." The guard costs Rs 1,200 to fit and considering that every battered hand costs several times that in hospital bills and sheer agony it is not a bad investment.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI in Pune

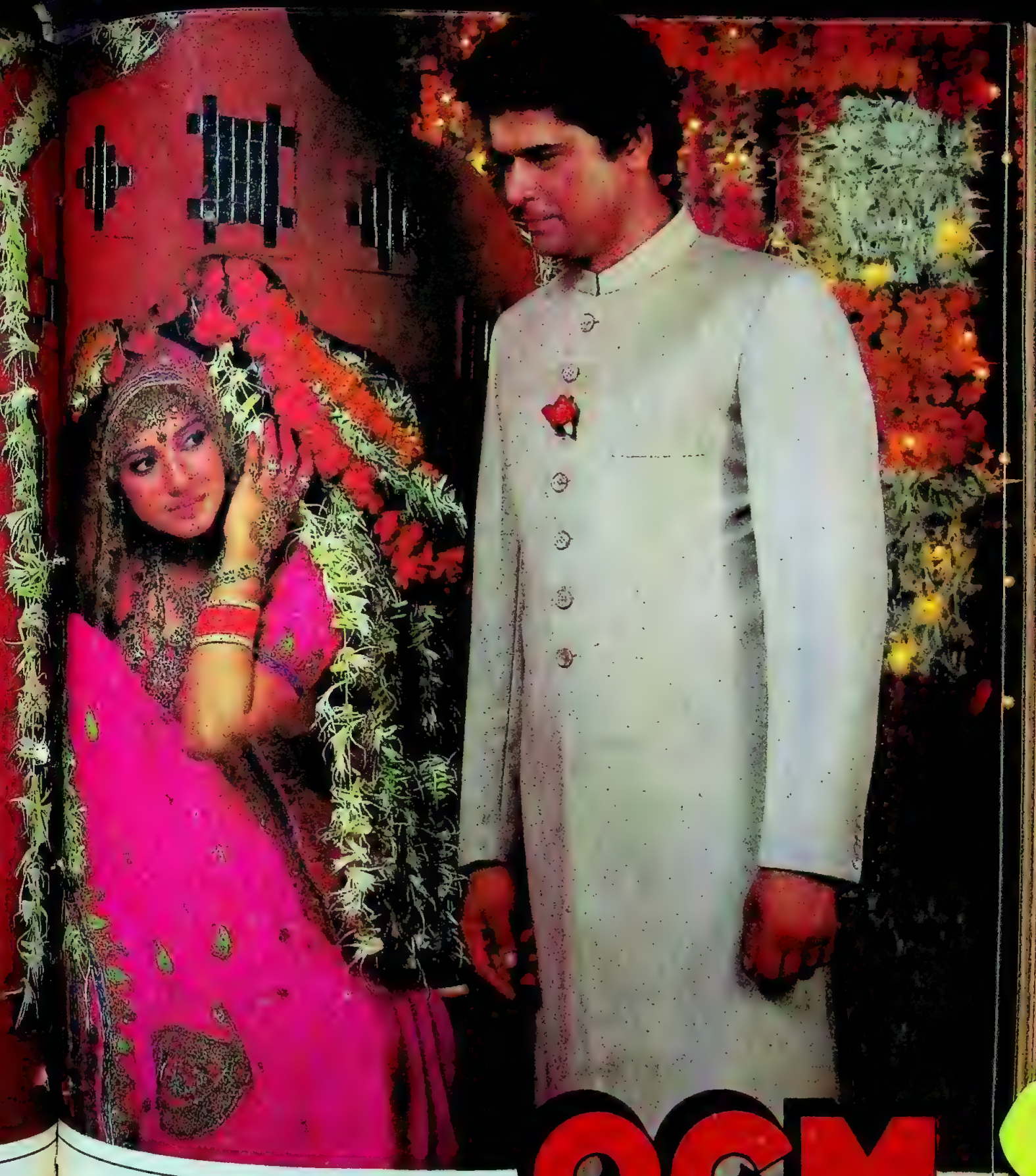


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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Great Gamble

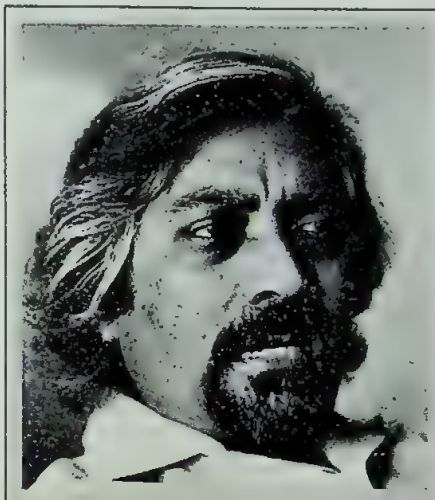
HOW MUCH is the Government of India willing to bet on the reputation and word of one man? When it comes to Satyen Pitroda, the answer is Rs 36 crore. Behind that answer lies an extraordinary sequence of events, and ahead of it either a trail-blazing success story in research and development or an embarrassing and costly disaster. Which, depends once again on Pitroda and the team that he is now putting together at the newly-formed Centre for Development of Telematics (CDOT) to develop a modern electronic switching system (the hardware inside a telephone exchange). When this comes, in three years' time, it is supposed to offer at least some hope of a better service to the harassed telephone users in the country.

It is a project that few countries have tried; and the successful multinational giants of the West have used 10 times the money and three times the time that Pitroda has been given (Rs 36 crore and 36 months). And, quite naturally, there is no shortage of both critics and cynics. But even cautious bureaucrats, many of them initially scornful, now say that Pitroda just might pull it off.

Pitroda is, of course, not just anybody. He left for the US 20 years ago, to blaze a trail in electronic telecommunications. Working first for the General Telephones and Electronics (GTE), then striking out on his own to float Wescom, which he sold to Rockwell International, where he worked as vice-president, he struck out on his own once again and now runs four companies from his base in Chicago. Along the way, he has acquired American citizenship, obtained over 50 global patents in his field of work, made more than $5 million on his share in the sale of Wescom, amassed other fortunes (his Rockwell salary, he says, was over $500,000) and—inevitably—reached his mid-life crisis. Having made his money and reputation while still in his late thirties, what next?

Turn to India, of course, to see what he could do back home. And CDOT's extraordinary story began three years ago, when a friend sent him a clipping regarding the Sarin Committee on telecommunications. Pitroda wrote to H.C. Sarin, asking for a hearing on what he could offer. Soon enough, he was winging his way to New Delhi, where a meeting with Sarin was followed up by one with P.C. Alexander, the prime minister's principal secretary. Old family friends then helped initiate some deft lobbying with Rajiv Gandhi and his trusted aide, Arun Singh, which finally landed him his big chance: a hearing from Mrs Gandhi.

"I prepared for that meeting like I would prepare for one with the ITT president," Pitroda says. Thinking out what exactly he could offer, putting together a set of slides to get the message across easily, and flying out armed with his own slide projector, he landed up in the prime minister's house for the all-important 60-minute session. His audience comprised Mrs Gandhi herself, a clutch of cabinet ministers, Rajiv Gandhi, and a host of officials and technical experts.



Pitroda: offering an alternative

On the strength of one non-resident Indian's promise of delivering the goods, the Government is willing to invest Rs 36 crore in one ambitious do-or-die research venture.

Pitroda put his message across: that the country's telecommunications system was in terrible shape, that it would continue to remain that way if India imported new systems from the West, and that the only way out was to design an indigenous system tailored to the country's specific needs. Mrs Gandhi asked no questions, none at all, but Rajiv made up for that.

There followed the slow grinding of the Government's machinery. Bureaucrats flew out to Chicago to check on Pitroda's credentials (one of them once accused him of being a CIA agent), there were innumerable meetings in Delhi and inter-ministerial wrangles. "I have learnt patience," says Pitroda, who himself has commuted between Chicago and New Delhi some 20 times in the last three years at a personal cost of some few lakhs of rupees. A little over a month ago, he finally got what he was after: the registration of CDOT as a society and the promise of Rs 36 crore over three years, with Pitroda himself appointed as advisor on an annual salary of Re 1 (but with his future travel and hotel bills to be paid by the Government).

By any yardstick, this is an unprecendented sequence of events. On the strength of one non-resident Indian's word, and his promise of delivering the goods in three years, the Government is willing to invest a sum that is almost equal to its entire R&D budget in one ambitious do-or-die research venture.

Can Pitroda's venture succeed, or is it a foolhardy enterprise pushed through by Rajiv Gandhi's bright-eyed computer boys with the misplaced enthusiasm of inexperience? The electronic switch for a telephone system is not child's play, even if Pitroda sometimes makes it sound like that.

But the Gujarati-American has little doubt about the answers: "We will deliver the system 101 per cent, within the cost and time limits." He argues that the multinational giants abroad have needed 10 times CDOT's budget because their software engineers cost 10 times as much as Indian counterparts, and that CDOT will need only three years because it knows exactly what it has to do.

But why take the trouble at all? After all, the country can buy a fully developed, proven system straightaway from abroad, and pay less than Rs 36 crore for the transfer of technology. Because, says Pitroda, "the western technologies are designed for their systems, which are different from ours". Most western telephone networks are characterised by a high density of telephone connections and low traffic per connection. The situation in India is quite the opposite: low density of telephone connections, and very high traffic per connection. A technology suited for the first situation, says Pitroda, will not work in the second.

He has a point. The heavy telephone



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traffic in India quickly choked a crossbar system bought from Belgium in the 1960s because it was designed for lighter traffic. And even the French electronic system contracted two years ago has not yet been tried out in Bombay's Worli exchange because of problems in marrying it with the rest of the city's telephone system.

Pitroda makes a series of other points: India needs a very high ratio of public telephones, and the systems developed abroad are not designed to handle this either; the country can never fully master an imported technology, and a maintenance problem may therefore have to be referred back to foreign experts; finally, the foreign exchange cost of an imported system is bloated by the import of a lot of hardware as a usual part of the package.

But the question marks remain. No technology can be mastered very easily, CDOT's system (if and when it comes) will draw on a substantial quantity of imported components and what Pitroda calls "raw technology", it will have to use indigenous components to the maximum extent possible even if they are not the latest available and cost three times as much as components do abroad, and—despite these handicaps—the system must cost much less per line than what is offered by the multinational giants in the field. But Pitroda points out that he has prior experience of developing a similar system for Brazil (under UN auspices), and that other Third World countries, South Korea, for example are following a similar strategy of indigenous technological development, with comparable budgets and using the help of expatriate nationals.

FINALLY, of course, Pitroda sees himself as nothing more than a catalyst. CDOT will depend for its manpower on the expertise already available within the country, and the team will be headed by M. Pitke of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Bombay, who is an electronics whiz, and G.B. Meemamsi of the Telecommunications Research Centre (TRC) in Delhi, who got the Padma Shri back in 1975 for designing an earlier generation of switching equipment.

Both Pitke and Meemamsi share Pitroda's enthusiasm for the task ahead, and his confidence. Says Meemamsi: "Pitroda is a man who can get things done, he is technically sound, and he has excellent contacts abroad. If it were not for him pushing things through, our Indian engineers would never have been given the chance to show what they can do."

While CDOT's work has started in earnest, it could easily get derailed midway if political support flags, or if companies abroad manage to scuttle it by peddling their own wares before CDOT has delivered the goods. Also, even if an electronic switch is successfully designed, the country's telephone system may remain the wreck it is unless the rest of the system is improved as well: telephone instruments, cables and maintenance practices. Pitroda is aware of this, and argues that designing the switch is only the first task that CDOT will take on. The rest will follow later: "There is obviously no point in developing a better switching system if the end service is not going to improve," he says. But the point is that the downstream tasks will take still more time, and Pitroda himself says that he is prepared to spend the next seven to 10 years of his life on the job improving the nation's telephone system.

For him, that investment in time and effort is worthwhile. As he says, "This is the project of my life. If I can make a difference to telecommunications in India, I will have paid my dues." But for the country, both the potential pay-offs and risks are much greater. If CDOT's system delivers, it will provide a tremendous boost to not just the telecommunications system but to confidence in domestic R&D as a whole; if it fails, it will be a disaster with an opposite fall-out for domestic R&D, while the country's telecom network will remain the disaster it now is.

—T.N. NINAN

RAILWAYS

Derailment

THE MINISTERIAL career of A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury is strewn with the corpses of officials who ran foul of him, and whom he either axed or summarily transferred to punishment postings. One celebrated case concerned M.S. Gujral, who was dismissed as chairman of the Railway Board early last year. Another concerned K.P. Mukherji, whom Ghani Khan Choudhury sacked as director (commercial) of Coal India in mid-1981. A third person, who escaped the axe, was P.C. Luthar, who earned Choudhury's ire as chairman of the Damodar Valley Corporation, but survived.

Gujral re-emerged in July last year as chairman of Coal India. And now Mukherji too has been vindicated by a landmark decision of the Delhi High Court, which has set aside his dismissal and ordered Coal India to pay him his salary from the date of his sacking in May 1981, totalling Rs 2 lakh. The court order states that Mukherji goes out without stigma and that he is eminently fit for public employment.





Ghani Khan Choudhury (left); and K.P. Mukherji

The story goes back to 1980, when Ghani Khan Choudhury became energy minister. Mukherji fell out with the new minister over the latter's issuing of huge coal permits to people in his parliamentary constituency of Malda. It's normal quota of coal was barely 4,000 tonnes, but Choudhury released permits for 36,000 tonnes to a long list of consumers, some of whom were non-existent and others less than 12 years old. Mukherji pointed out that such releases were against Coal India's internal guidelines and highly irregular.

Soon enough, Mukherji was asked to go on leave, and then transferred to Delhi, where he was given neither an office nor secretarial support, nor any work though he was the second ranking officer in the company. No papers were marked to him, and he was called to no meetings. Finally, in May 1981, he was sacked and given three months pay in lieu of notice.

Mukherji took the issue to the Calcutta High Court and got a stay order. But the Central Government objected to the court's jurisdiction, and the case was shifted to Delhi. Finally, after a 39-month battle, Mukherji has emerged victorious, the Government having given a commitment to the judges that it will not go in appeal.

Mukherji has chosen not to go back to work in Coal India, and resigned after the judges gave their decision. But he says: "There used to be a time when people left the private sector to join the public sector because of job security. In recent times, the reverse has been taking place because top-level public sector jobs are now more insecure."

—T.N. NINAN

TEXTILES

Threadbare Situation

EVERY fourth sick unit in the country is a textile mill, and the cloth-producing industry does not need any additional headaches. But fresh headaches are what the industry seems likely to get. The Indian Cotton Mills Federation (ICMF), the apex body for the organised mill sector, warned last fortnight that the industry was all set for another nosedive because, quite simply, it was running out of cotton.

The mills in the organised sector consume slightly under 80 lakh bales of cotton every year—each bale weighs 170 kg. Cotton does not grow the year round, and crucial to the mills is a carry-over buffer stock usually put at about 20 lakh bales, or three months consumption. When the season opened last year, the carry-over was 25 lakh bales and production in 1983-84 was estimated to be 85 lakh bales. After domestic consumption and exports, totalling slightly over 88 lakh bales, this should have left a comfortable 22 lakh bales as carry-over for the 1984-85 season. Unfortunately, the 1983-84 cotton crop was overestimated by about 10 lakh bales, which reduces the carry-over to just 12 lakh bales, worse, even assuming that both cotton production and mill consumption for 1984-85 remain at the previous year's levels, the carry-over at the beginning of next year's season will be a measly 3 lakh bales. Says Kantikumar Podar, ICMF president: "This could very well be the last straw."



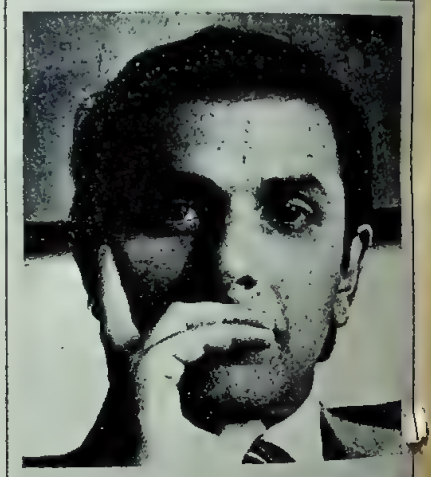
"The shortage could very well prove to be the last straw."

KANTIKUMAR PODAR,
president, ICMF

That is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is clear that with cotton stocks low—enough for about one-and-a-half months—and prices reigning some 50 per cent above those last year, the mills are in serious trouble. In fact there is a general raw material shortage plaguing the entire industry, and the Government has decided to import 50,000 tonnes of Viscose Staple Fibre (VSF) to tide over the lean period. The duty on VSF has been reduced from 45 per cent to 30 per cent to ensure that the landed price is on par with indigenous market levels. However, mill-owners are generally pessimistic. Says Nusli Wadia of Bombay Dyeing: "The shortage is going to drive the industry even deeper into trouble." Adds ICMF Secretary-General C.V. Radhakrishnan: "We are going to have a very bad 12 months."

But the crisis-ridden industry is behaving in rather curious ways. Though plagued with a lack of demand for its products and therefore saddled with excess spinning and weaving capacities, the industry is busy adding yet more production facilities to an already swollen kitty. There are, at the moment, 23.80 million spindles installed all over the country, one million more than the target in the sixth plan. As it is, only about 17 million of these are being worked because of what one industry specialist calls "financial constraints". However, in a remarkable development, another 17 million spindles have been applied for under the Government's newly liberal licensing policy. In other words, the industry is heading deliberately towards an unprecedented overcapacity. This could be for any one of several reasons: while the inefficient and sick companies fall by the wayside, the successful ones might be trying to increase their share in the market; or the organised textile mills may be adjusting to a new role as spinners who provide yarn to the booming powerloom sector of the industry; or, finally—and this is the view of former ICMF President Arvind Lalbhai—it could be plain misuse of capital that revives memories of the once mindless rush into mini-steel plants. Says Lalbhai: "Apart from the misuse of scarce capital this will expose the existing units to a state of chronic under-utilisation of capacity and uneconomic working."

Lalbhai did not point out that the existing units are already in a state of chronic under-utilisation of capacity and uneconomic working. The main cause of this is of course, the powerloom sector, now bowling along with over 7 lakh powerlooms installed, a cost of production that is 17 to 30 per cent less than that of the organised sector, and with few overheads and scruples—and relatively cheap labour: according to the industry's estimates a powerloom worker gets barely a third of what his counterpart in the mill sector gets, with few benefits or job security. "We need protection against them," says Radhakrishnan gloomily, "they beat us on everything except quality."



"The shortage is going to drive the industry deeper into trouble."

NUSLI WADIA
chairman & managing director
Bombay Dyeing

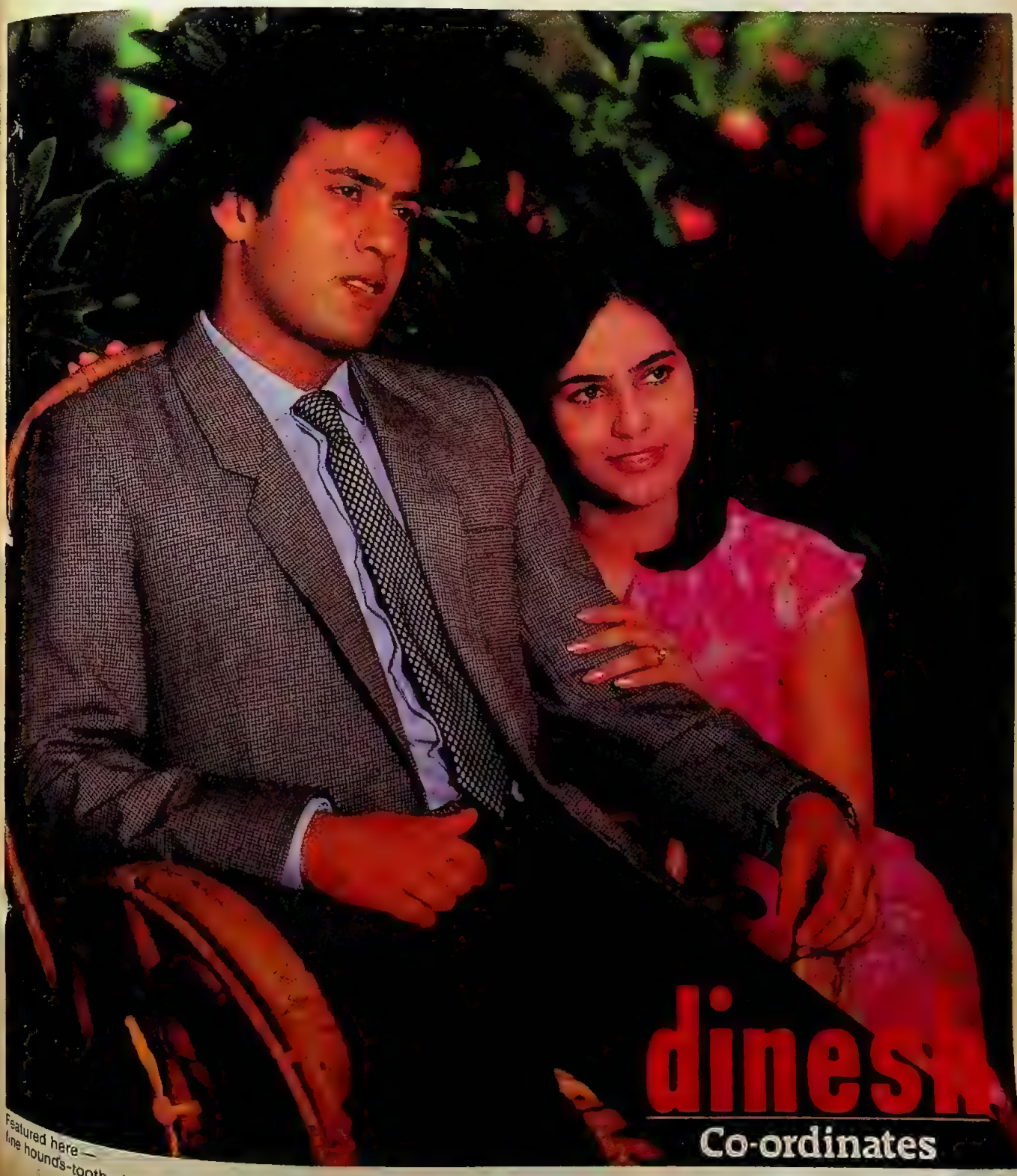
So far, there are no signs that the Government is going to come riding to the rescue. There has only been talk of setting up an early warning system to determine when a mill is sick, an idea which is greeted with hoots of derision in Bombay boardrooms still hung with portraits of textile pioneers. As a prominent mill-owner put it: "We don't need the babus to tell us we are sick. We know we are. The point is what are they going to do about it." The point also is that equally sharp questions can be directed at the mill-owners over their handling of the industry. But the most relevant point of them all is that no answers are coming from either side.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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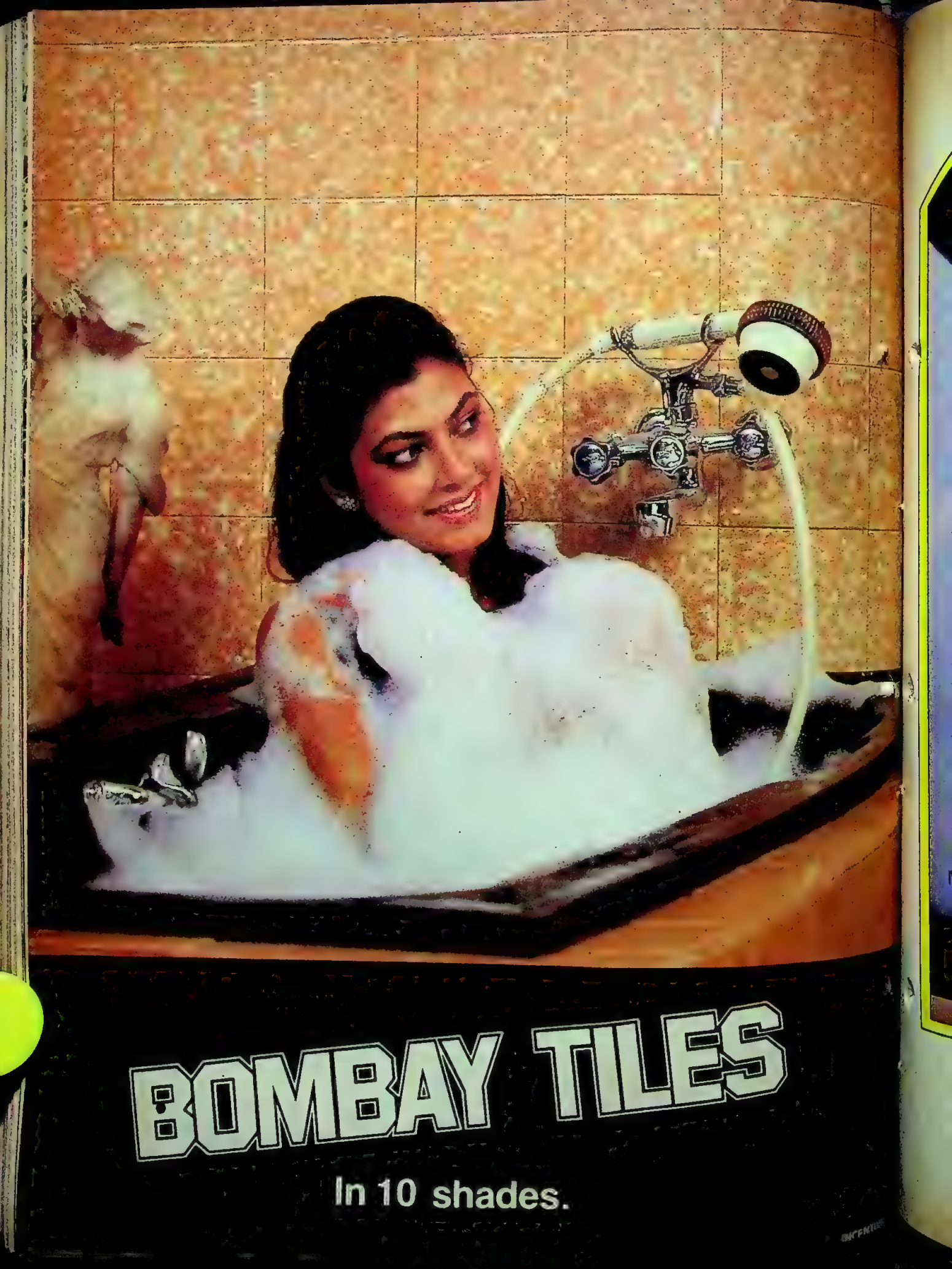
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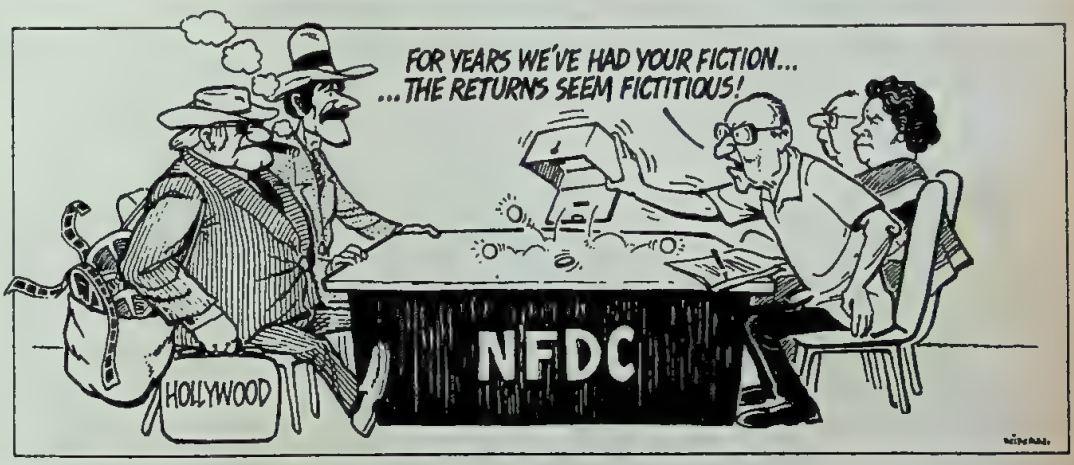
Hollywood or Bust

AFTER more than a year of wrangling, delaying and contentious negotiating, has the time come for millions of Indian fans to say goodbye to Hollywood movies? Unlike Hollywood's screen image of all love-hate relationships dissolving into a sunset-in-soft-focus freeze, India's relationship with Hollywood shows all the signs of becoming a protracted stick-in-the-mud saga.

The latest is that unless the American consortium of film producers, the Motion Pictures Export Association of America (MPEAA), comes up with a better package for the sole film-importing agency in India, the National Film Development Corporation(NFDC), before October-end, they may be told to pack up their operation and go home. Two MPEAA officials, Senior Vice-President Don Nathan and Vice-President in charge of South-east Asia, Stephen Clug, arrived in August to confer with NFDC and Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (I&B) officials, but had to return empty-handed. And now the reports are that the all-powerful Jack Valenti, MPEAA's doughty president, may have to arrive himself to retrieve lost ground. After all, as one senior I&B official admitted last fortnight, the question of whether Hollywood films will or won't stay in India isn't simply a commercial or artistic issue: it's at heart a political matter with American films traditionally being a propaganda weapon. It's not the same as banishing Coca-Cola from the country for the simple reason that Hollywood's brand of fizz is more or less irreplaceable.

Pending a renewal and revision of the 1980 agreement between the Indian Government and the MPEAA, which ended in September 1983, all imports of American films into India have been curtailed (only 30 films imported before that are in circulation) and MPEAA has been operating on periodic extensions doled out by the I&B Ministry (INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1983). The situation has now become perilous with the Government backing the NFDC's claim that the MPEAA has been "cheating" it. The NFDC charges a 15 per cent canalising fee on film prints imported; and the MPEAA, in an effort to reduce this fee, has been undervaluing its prints at between $700 and $900. The internationally accepted cost per print, says NFDC, is $1,600. Result: NFDC netted only Rs 3.8 lakh in canalising fees during 1982-83—chicken-feed according to the Government for the import of some 100 films.

But even if the two quiet Americans representing MPEAA had agreed to revising the fee, the NFDC was bent upon extracting a bigger pound of flesh. According to I&B officials who have worked out the financial details, if they were to open the Indian market for film imports after dumping the MPEAA, the NFDC could stand to gain anywhere between Rs 1 crore and Rs 1.5 crore annually in canalising fees. They quote the example of such earnings through the import of non-MPEAA films. Some of the practised alternatives are:



► Hindi films such as *Door Desh*, *Nanmumkin* and *Cricketer* made by Indians resident abroad, who pay NFDC a canalising fee of US $10,000 per film as well as 15 per cent of overflow in box-office receipts.

► The 10 to 15 foreign films NFDC buys yearly after they have been entered into Indian film festivals for an overall outgo of Rs 20 lakh in foreign exchange. The NFDC charges 15 per cent of the value of the film print plus another 15 per cent royalty on box-office returns. It has been earning about Rs 4 lakh annually this way.

► Through direct imports against foreign exchange payments on which NFDC has been earning around Rs 40 lakh a year for the past three years.

In addition to allegations of being ripped off, the Government's old argument of the MPEAA continuing to dump trash (not necessarily American-made) in India has an authentic ring for Indian film buffs. And government officials who have been vehemently championing a hard bargain with the MPEAA eloquently also quote the example of MPEAA's agreements with NFDC-type agencies in countries as far apart as Turkey, Kenya, Pakistan and Singapore, where profit-sharing is the norm. But they are stumped for answers when asked why the Government, knowing the agreement was due to be renegotiated in 1983, wasn't prepared with alternatives, and why it continued to grant MPEAA not one or two but three extensions and prolonged the deadlock.

Meanwhile, the communication gap between the Bombay-based NFDC and the ministry in New Delhi is one of those unbridgeable chasms that govern the national policy on film imports. So NFDC's own operation as an importer or promoter of foreign films is hardly above reproach. In the four years of its existence as an all-purpose, autonomous corporation, it has done little to establish its own distribution or exhibition network. And its pious denunciations of MPEAA's selection of movies as trashy are no compensation for the kind of fare that creeps into its own selection. Among the titles its current list contains are obscure bits of Hong Kong-made junk like *Snake In The Monkey's Shadow*, American B-graders like *Galaxina* and *Cry Blood Apache* and, worst of all, a new package that heralds the return of the *Crazy Boys* series from France after they made an exit following media pressure.

Such being the antecedents of all the parties concerned, it is not surprising that the Government-NFDC-MPEAA snafu defies an easy solution. While the wrangling on grounds of commercial or artistic scrupulousness continues, the loser remains the film-going public, whose long-standing affair with Hollywood is, clearly, not the stuff screen romances are made of.

—SUNIL SETHI

KRISHNA M KISHAN



Buses at a BSRTC depot: death throes

BSRTC

Sinking Leviathan

MOST state road transport corporations have a bad safety record, with rash drivers killing either their passengers or innocent pedestrians. But the Bihar State Road Transport Corporation has been so badly driven that it now seems ready to kill itself. The corporation's Chairman-cum-Managing Director, C.R. Venkatraman, shot in a 15-page note last fortnight, suggesting that it be "liquidated" if the state Government could not rehabilitate it fully, and then went on leave "out of disgust". But a chief minister who exactly a year ago had given all the state's 46 losing public sector units three months' time to improve their performance or get ready to close down was suddenly petrified into inaction. And a visibly upset Transport Minister, Mohammed Hussain Azad, told INDIA TODAY: "Liquidation is no solution. How can a democratic and welfare government do this?"

But Venkatraman's extreme proposal is understandable. Employees in several depots and divisions have not been paid their salaries for six months; this plus other outstanding dues totalled a hefty Rs 26.87 crore in May, equal to more than a full year's revenue, which in any case is short of expenditure by Rs 12 crore. The accumulated losses now total Rs 39 crore on an investment of Rs 57 crore.

But beyond these bare financial details, there lies a story of gross mismanagement and deepening crisis. The number of corporation buses on the roads has been steadily dwindling: from over 1,000 a year ago to 983 in April, 922 in May, 888 in June and 876 in July. Close to 45 per cent of the total fleet of 1,514 buses is now off the road, some 200 of them because the organisation does not have money to buy tyres!

Inevitably, revenues too have dropped —despite a 26 per cent hike in bus fares over the last couple of years. The average monthly earnings now total just Rs 1.77 crore, while the monthly operational expenses alone total Rs 2.18 crore. The total monthly costs amount to Rs 2.78 crore. Indeed, in the last April-June quarter, earnings at Rs 5.31 crore fell well short of the Rs 6.18 crore earned during the corresponding quarter last year.

Expenses have stayed high, partly because of outrageous over-manning. The corporation is supposed to employ 5,000, but has 14,000 on its rolls.

If revenues have been dropping, expenses have stayed high, partly because of outrageous over-manning. The corporation is supposed to employ 5,000, but has 14,000 on its rolls, so that more than half the income goes in salaries and allowances. Venkatraman has said in his 15-page note that the excess manpower was the result of "irregular and unwarranted appointments made in the past"; and a high-level committee that recommended retrenching 4,000 employees last September now finds its report gathering dust. The committee had said that the retrenchment would save the corporation Rs 2 crore every year, with the termination costs amounting to no more than a manageable Rs 60 lakh.

Finally, there is the growing problem of illegal competition from private bus operators, many of them influential politicians. Private buses now total 11,000, and Venkatraman said that the corporation could not fight this in a court of law because most of the operators got temporary permits, and then obtained fresh permits once the old ones had expired. "The operation of private buses on notified routes has shattered the legal monopoly granted to the corporation under the law." On tax evasion alone, the monthly loss of revenue to the state exchequer is estimated to be as much as Rs 2 crore.

A year ago, the corporation's then chairman and managing director, B.K. Singh, and its vigilance director, D.P.Ojha, had detected large-scale racketeering in the issue of permits, and sought the Government's permission to prosecute 300 people, including 15 IAS officers, three IPS officers and a host of politicians. This created the inevitable stir. Singh was transferred and the vigilance director's post abolished. Finally, early this year, the Government constituted a new 15-member board that included four officers against whom Ojha had recommended the registration of criminal cases.

If Venkatraman too seems to be making his way out of the unholy mess, there have been others who threw their hands up in helplessness. Three years ago, Abhas Kumar Chatterjee, who was the corporation's managing director, was shifted out of the organisation on promotion after a staff dispute. In disgust he declined the promotion, and is now in the state board of revenue.

None of these comings and goings of officials has, however, made any difference. And there is little doubt that the corporation is sinking steadily into the slough. But the state Government shows little inclination to accept Venkatraman's suggestion, and Azad's sudden eagerness to dust off the report of last year's high-level committee and start retrenching surplus staff may be nothing more than a dishonest piece of evasive action.

—FARZAND AHMED


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TYPEWRITERS

Key Battle

AFTER years of technological somnolence, they're leaping into the electronics age. Typewriter industry leader Godrej has launched in Bombay the country's first home-grown electronic typewriter, industry majors Facit Asia Ltd, Remington Rand and the Rayala Corporation, manufacturer of Halda typewriters, have been licenced to put on the market 5,000 electronic typewriters each, and over a dozen outsiders with newly-granted government licences or letters of intent in their pockets are swooping on the industry and scurrying around tying up deals with foreign manufacturers. Advani Oerlikon is busily wooing Olivetti, Usha Computers and Peripherals has clinched an informal arrangement with Silver Reed International of Japan, and DCM has bagged a licence to go into production. All this frenetic activity takes fresh industry capacity for electronic machines to a whopping 70,000, close to 70 per cent of current total manual typewriter output. Clearly, the industry is undergoing something of a technological revolution.

But the name of the game is assembling: The Delhi-based Indian Communications Network Ltd (estimated 1984 turnover: Rs 7 crore) got a head start by hawking for Rs 49,800 electronic typewriters that were largely assembled from components imported from Hermes of Switzerland. Logic Systems Pvt Ltd (estimated 1984 turnover: Rs 8 crore), also of Delhi, followed suit four months ago with components bought from Business Systems Inc, Holland, the Calcutta-based Remington Rand has teamed up with Remington of Brazil, and the Bombay-based Facit is setting up a plant at Bhimtal near Nainital to initially assemble machines from components imported from Facit, Sweden.

Admits T.R.S. Goyal, proprietor of Logic Systems: "Basically, all companies assemble imported components. And the low economies of scale don't justify manufacture here."

Goyal's point is well taken. The market with its low volumes is small beer right now. An estimated 1,000 electronic typewriters worth Rs 10 crore plus were sold last year by Network, Logic and a clutch of small companies. But Manu M. Parpia, Godrej's consultant on its electronic typewriter project, says that annual sales in numerical terms could climb to 5,000-7,000 in two years. "It all depends on the price. If the industry could sell machines for Rs 10,000; 30,000 typewriters could be sold every year," he adds. Indirect taxes account for 45 per cent of the price, but Parpia and Goyal point to the silver lining on the cloud: electronic component prices abroad may fall from their recent highs, and the competition will hot up as more enter the arena.

There are signals that this is already happening. Goyal plans to introduce next March a model priced about 36 per cent less than his Rs 24,000 Hindi-English typewriter, and Network has introduced three cheaper (Rs 20,000-Rs 40,000) models, all confirming Facit Chairman Fredie Mehta's worst fears of a "very tough" market. Mehta adds that his company is naturally enough, quite wary about what he calls the "quick kill blitzkrieg" of the domestic assemblers.

The posse of new companies descending on the electronic typewriter industry brings into contrast the domination of the manual typewriter market by the four heavyweights. The four have been slugging it out in a market where output at 1.07 lakh has sizeably exceeded demand, amid charges of price cutting and foul play. P.G. Rangabashyam, sales consultant of Rayala, says that a price war was triggered off by Godrej offering an 18 per cent discount, and Facit joining the fray with a 15 per cent discount—an allegation that Facit and Godrej officials contest. Facit's Mehta claims that his company doesn't offer discounts, and K.R. Hathi, Godrej's general manager, marketing, says, "There has certainly not been any price war."

That may or may not be so, but manufacturers are undeniably being compelled by a tight market to diversify. They have to, a Network spokesman argues, to survive. "Product life cycles are getting shorter—the manual typewriter reigned abroad for 60 years, the electric for 60—and companies that didn't adapt quickly enough went bust or lost market shares."

In the immediate future, as many company spokesmen say, manual typewriters will hold their own against their more pricey electronic brethren. But in the medium-term perspective, a fundamental technological transition has now begun.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

Logic Systems' Goyal and (bottom) Facit chairman Mehta: stiff competition





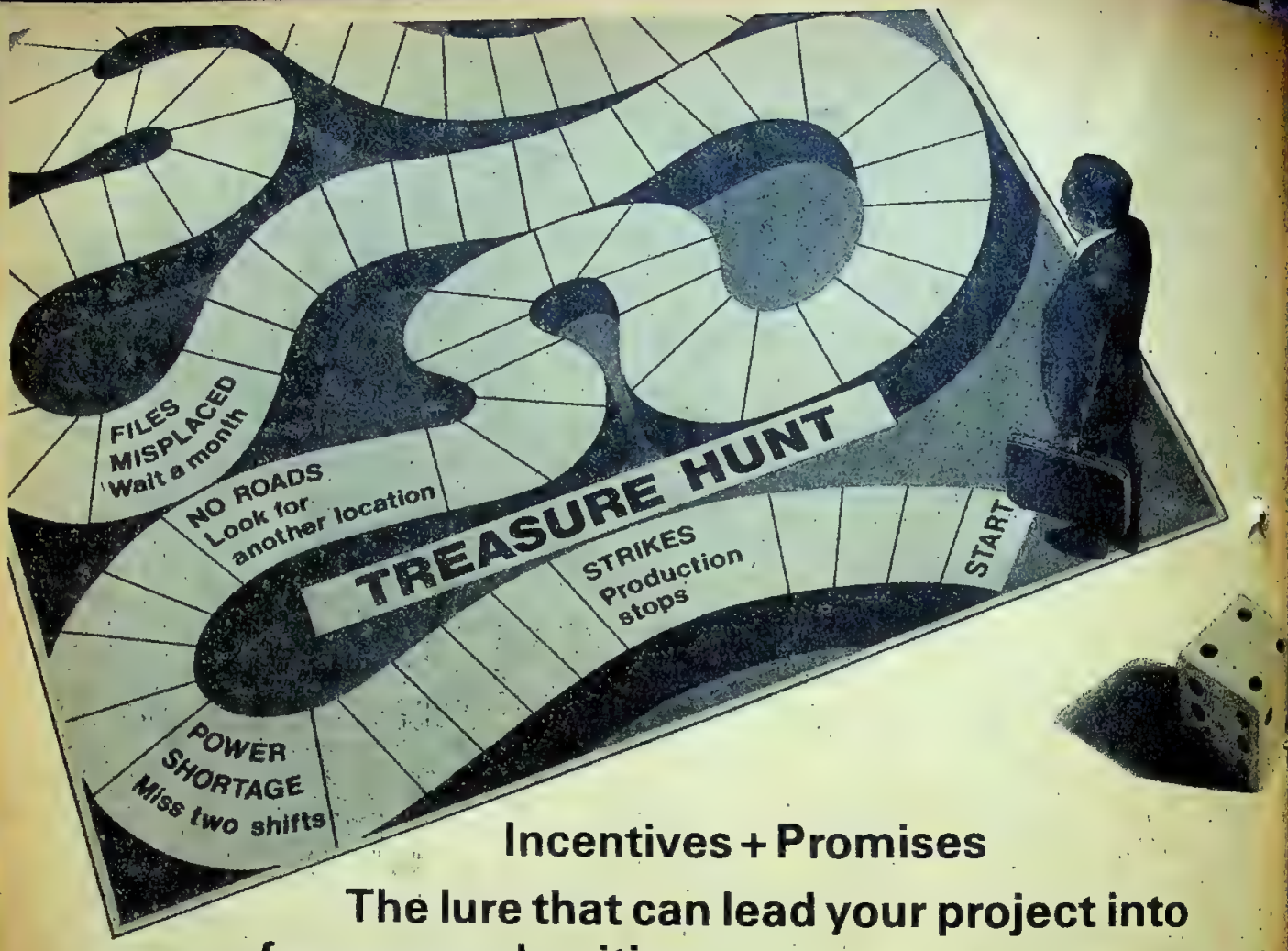
THE MARKETS

The Bear-hug

THE MARKET is sinking, there is no doubt about it, and at the rate it is going down—it was only 4 per cent above last year's level a week ago—it seems to be totally in the grip of bears who are apparently having the time of their lives. The market has been losing roughly a point a week; at this rate it will have shed all its gains before the year is out. But of course the elections will have been announced by then and when the results are out the fat may be in the fire.

However, the financial institutions have not withdrawn from the market and are apparently rushing in where the angels fear to tread. According to reports, they have purchased sizeable chunks of Associated Cement, Mangalam Cement (which has gained five points) and, surprisingly, Tata Steel. All these scrips are up, Associated Cement having touched the year's high. Tata Steel is also close to its previous high mark, despite the chairman's less than cheerful remarks at the AGM. Reliance is also riding high despite rumours that some bear operators were trying to beat it down. JK Synthetics and Indian Organic are in the limelight and so is Kirloskar Cummins which gained 25 points during the fortnight.

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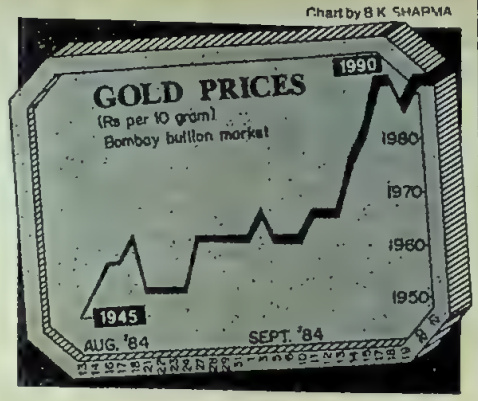
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ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.9.84	Change on fortnight
Apex	62.50	48.00	61.50	nil
Ashok Leyland	37.50	27.50	28.00	0.25 –
Associated Cement	407.00	298.50	407.00	19.50 +
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.75	31.50	0.50 +
Ballarpur	53.30	43.30	44.20	1.40 –
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	265.00	8.00 –
BASF	49.00	28.50	43.00	nil
Bata India	48.35	33.30	40.50	1.40 –
Bharat Commerce	20.65	15.10	15.10	0.50 –
Birla Jute	62.50	52.10	53.00	0.50 +
Blow Plast	48.50	37.50	37.50	2.50 –
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	30.00	1.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	59.00	59.00	1.00 –
Boots	67.00	40.00	40.00	2.00 –
Britannia Industries	40.60	33.60	37.50	1.50 +
Brooke Bond	45.00	34.10	40.50	0.75 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	840.00	3.75 +
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	47.00	0.25 –
Coates of India	30.87	26.50	28.00	nil
Colgate	115.00	100.00	115.00	4.50 +
Cyanamid	45.50	32.00	36.00	1.50 –
DCM	76.12	47.00	48.50	1.75 –
Dunlop	27.60	24.20	24.20	0.10 –
East India Hotels	40.25	29.00	36.00	0.37 –
Escon	58.50	31.00	52.50	0.50 –
Escorts	76.00	50.25	50.25	2.50 –
Food Specialities	92.00	69.00	78.00	1.00 –
Gen Carbon	25.00	14.50	14.50	0.50 –
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	20.30	21.10	nil
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	49.50	0.75 –
Herdillia Chemicals	26.00	20.50	26.00	nil
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	44.00	47.10	0.50 –
Hindustan Cocoa	55.00	31.00	52.00	2.25 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	49.00	nil
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	41.80	0.20 –
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.00	24.00	0.10 –
Indian Explosives	28.00	25.00	27.25	1.25 +
Indian Organic	40.75	31.00	40.75	1.75 +
Indian Oxygen	38.25	33.00	38.25	0.50 +
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	60.00	1.25 +
IPCL Synthetics	47.60	39.00	46.50	4.80 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	50.00	0.50 –
Kesoram Industries	61.60	46.90	47.10	0.20 –
Kinetic Engineering	156.00	113.00	149.00	3.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	650.00	407.50	533.00	25.50 +
Kothari (Madras)	27.00	22.00	25.50	0.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	65.00	74.50	0.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	52.00	46.00	–
Mangalam Cement	31.00	21.00	25.75	5.25 +
Modi Rubber	30.31	24.50	25.50	0.25 +
National Organic	208.75	176.50	206.50	4.00 +
Norton	39.00	32.00	35.75	0.25 +
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	57.50	3.37 –
Ots Elevator	73.00	54.00	70.00	4.00 +
Premier Automobiles	314.00	246.00	303.00	1.50 –
Ranbaxy	65.00	14.00	46.50	0.50 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	53.00	56.50	0.50 +
Reliance Textiles	125.00	110.00	125.00	6.50 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	30.47	35.25	0.75 +
Siemens	47.50	41.00	41.00	nil
Sirpur	39.05	28.06	38.00	0.05 –
Tata Chemicals	57.00	42.20	44.80	2.60 +
Tata Steel	71.00	53.00	62.00	1.75 +
Telco	328.50	244.50	328.00	10.50 +
Tenmaco	430.00	385.00	387.00	1.00 –
Union Carbide	87.00	49.60	65.70	0.50 +
Usha Martin Industries	29.50	24.40	27.50	0.20 +
Voltas	22.50	19.50	20.50	0.20 +
Wimco	395.00	330.00	380.00	10.00 +
20th Century Leasing	45.50	28.50	35.00	2.50 –
Unit Trust	48.00	29.00	29.00	0.50 –
	14.35	12.60	13.26	nil



have taken a beating are textiles (Reliance is an exception), cement (which should have done much better but has not) and shipping, which is trying to raise its head but has a long way to go before it can do so. Shares which have done remarkably well include plantations, fertilisers and transport equipment. But nearly all of them are now steadily losing ground; tea shares having lost more than 6 per cent in less than a month and transport equipment nearly as much. Things might improve, however, with the financial institutions stepping in.

In the meantime, there are reports that most new issues have done well. Max India, an associate of Ranbaxy, is said to have collected nearly Rs 10 crore, the issue having been oversubscribed 26 times, something of a record for a relatively small company. There is money in the market, as Ambani will tell you, and all that the promoters have to do is to tap it at the source at the right time. There is evidence that many investors are keeping some cash for the forthcoming debenture issues of prominent companies like Larsen & Toubro, but there is still more where it came from, despite the fact that, according to a recent study, the companies have been holding back on the distribution of dividends. It may have something to do with the recession, or may be it is inflation cutting into profits, but this has not stopped the flow of money into new issues.

Inflation is still a big worry, though not as big as the continuing uncertainty on the political front, but this has not so far affected industrial production and may not do so as long as the finance minister is able to keep it, inflation, that is, within reasonable limits. It is surprising that prices should go up in a year of bumper harvest, but most investors are city folk and with the bonuses and other goodies that are being announced almost daily, they might end with more cash than they had bargained for even after making an allowance for the rising prices.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

COMMODITIES

Aug 11, 1984	LATEST	Change on month
RBI Index of Wholesale Prices*	344.9	6.9 +
Chemicals	409.7	1.3 +
Edible Oils	343.6	3.0 +
Metals Products	331.1	nil
Gold, standard (Sep 18)		
Rs per 10 gm	1960.00	1.00 +
Silver, .999 (Sep 18)		
Rs per kg	3450.00	10.00 –

SHARES

Aug 25, 1984		
RBI Index of Share Price*	206.5	5.1 –
Cement	240.2	17.3 –
Chemical Fertilisers	281.3	6.5 +
Paper	238.8	3.2 +
Transport Equipment	345.9	16.9 –

MONEY

Aug 24, 1984

Interest Rates		
Bank Rate	10%	nil
Call Money Rate	9.45%	0.11% –
Exim Bank, direct loans	9%	nil
IDBI, direct loans	14%	nil
NABARD, refinance	6.5%	nil
Money Supply (Aug 17)		0.3%
Bank Deposits		0.5%
Foreign Exchange Assets		7.6% –

*Index: 1970-71 = 100

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.9121	9.8003
Austria	Schilling	100	55.02211	54.4076
Bahrain	Dinar	1	30.6021	30.5843
Bangladesh	Taka	100	0.4423	0.4311
Canada	Dollar	1	9.1378	9.0383
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.0646	1.0529
Egypt	Pound	1	13.9520	13.9312
France	Franc	1	1.2550	1.2410
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5229	1.5066
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1120	1.0930
Iran	Rial	100	1.2132	1.1911
Italy	Lira	100	0.6219	0.6081
Japan	Yen	100	4.8739	4.8196
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7792	0.7601
Kuwait	Dinar	1	38.9012	38.6211
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0672	5.0098
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8012	0.7992
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7721	0.7593
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.4116	3.3739
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8113	0.7989
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.5291	5.4863
Spain	Peseta	100	8.9713	8.8592
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4490	0.4344
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3754	1.3600
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.7134	4.6582
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6129	0.6083
Thailand	Baht	100	49.5010	49.0012
UK	Pound	1	14.6799	14.5486
USA	Dollar	1	12.0625	11.9250
UAE	Dirham	1	3.1291	3.0813
USSR	Rouble	1	13.6422	13.2319
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.8474	3.8088

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 21.9.84.

CRICKET

A Season of Hope

AUSTRALIA sans Lillee, Pakistan without Imran and Sarfraz and England minus Botham and Willis. Small wonder that Sunil Gavaskar makes so bold as to term it Indian cricket's "season of hope". But if his cautious prediction does come to pass, it will have been painfully overdue.India are currently on a losing streak that has stretched to 29 Tests. The last Test match the country won was in December 1981. Since then, the only consolation has been the Prudential Cup victory under Kapil Dev and the Asia Cup win at Sharjah under Sunil Gavaskar.

The pre-season rituals were, however, hardly cause for much optimism. The overblown suspense drama that marks the start of every cricket season has become almost a required rite of passage.The suspense, mainly the imaginative product of the country's cricketing pundits, was whether the captaincy would be retained by Kapil or recaptured by Gavaskar. In the event, the selectors took barely half an hour to unanimously opt for the latter, a choice that few could find fault with. In a recent mini-poll among former cricketing greats taken by the country's leading sporting magazine, former cricket captain Ajit Wadekar and Test stars Bapu Nadkarni and Salim Durrani had no hesitation in giving Gavaskar the nod for his "greater experience and the respect he commands among the players".

But if Gavaskar's uncontested appointment robbed the season of its quota of controversies, the so-called rift between the two 'camps', the players from the north led by Kapil and the rest ranged behind Gavaskar, was quickly there to make up the deficiency. The truth of the matter is that the two leading lights of Indian cricket have far too much respect for each others' abilities and talents to let petty rivalry affect their—and by extension the team's—performance.Even before the captaincy issue surfaced, Kapil had stated that he was prepared to play under anybody (for 'anybody' read Gavaskar). And the Little Master himself cannot conceal the admiration in his voice when he speaks of Kapil as "our first-strike weapon" and a "match winner who will be India's main hope long after most of us have gone".

Kapil, however grudgingly, will be the first to admit that he has not worn the captaincy well.The additional pressure has detracted from his obvious class as an all-rounder of exceptional talent and it has also resulted in some questionable decisions at crucial moments.Freed from the burdens imposed by the captain's cap, Kapil is certain to play the lead role in the coming season's dramatics.

Not that Gavaskar's will be any less. India's most prolific run-getter is poised on the brink of yet another record—his 100th Test for India. There could be no better tribute to his contribution to Indian cricket than for him to pass that particular milestone as captain.There is irony in the fact that his initial ouster was after the debacle against Pakistan in 1982-83. The wheel has come full circle and he will cross the border to Pakistan on October 10, once again as captain.

There is a vast difference between the

BHAWAN SINGH



Gavaskar: back at the helm

Gavaskar of then and the gracefully-greying man of today.The pressure of chasing the immortal Bradman's record of 29 Test centuries and a surfeit of cricket had crippled his performance as well as his confidence.Rid of that particular albatross, he now looks relaxed and confident, secure in the knowledge that he can play his natural game and let his experience dictate his moves as captain."It is a tremendous honour to merely play for one's country," he says in all seriousness. "If the captaincy comes along, well, that is just a bonus."

But it is also a bonus that he will have to earn the hard way.Cricketers the world over are agreed that no other tour takes so much out of them as the Pakistan one. Gavaskar flatly states that apart from the West Indies, no country is capable of besting Pakistan at home, a belief that is difficult to dispute.Even with the absence of Imran Khan, Gavaskar is reluctant to make any predictions."We will have to wait and see what kind of wickets they prepare. Earlier, they were tailored to suit Imran but they would hardly do that now with Kapil on the opposing team."

Even less venturesome have been the selectors responsible for picking the team Gavaskar will eventually lead.For the one-day internationals against Australia and the month-long tour of Pakistan, the players named are almost a carbon copy of the team that won the Asia Cup.The only newcomer to be included is Saurashtra off-spinner Ashok Patel who has some impressive domestic performances to his credit.But his selection is restricted to the Australian ties only. For the rest, the only interest will be the experiment with a new opening pair with Gavaskar having expressed his preference for batting at number four. Surinder Khanna's hard-hitting batting may fit the one-day bill but his Test match temperament is still in serious doubt. Further, as wicket-keeper-batsman, his inclusion will be at the expense of Syed Kirmani, still undoubtedly the country's best wicket-keeper. Khanna's keeping during the Irani Cup and the farcical trial matches left much to be desired and he is still to show his class as an opener of Test standards. But if he is not selected to open the innings, the two men at the crease will be Ghulam Parkar and Anshuman Gaekwad. Both have been in and out of the Indian team without really achieving consistency.However, the only consolation is that with Gavaskar going lower down, India's brittle middle order will be solidified. Sandeep Patil has become less impetuous in his approach and some big scores from his weighted bat are long overdue. The lanky Vengsarkar is another batsman who has been performing well below his talents and the knowledge that another failure will put his head on the block should spur him to greater deeds.

But the man most eyes will be on is Mohinder Amarnath, recalled along with spinner Shivlal Yadav for the tour of Pakistan. Amarnath's original come-back in 1982 was one of the most outstanding in cricketing history, but then he hit a disastrous patch and has been going downhill ever since.By recalling him for the tour, the selectors may have done wonders for

ASHOK VAKIL

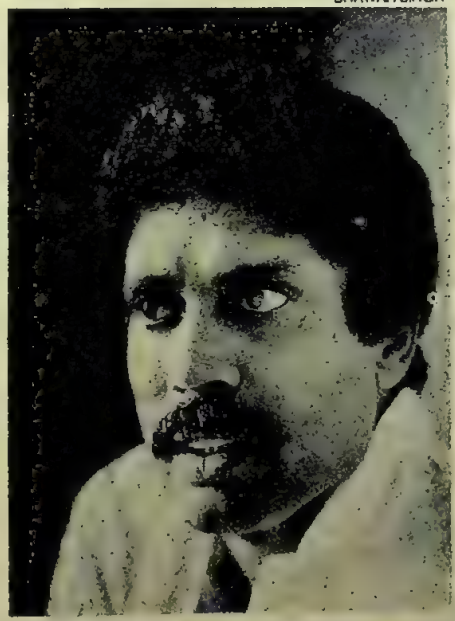


his self-confidence. "He looks in good nick though I've only seen him in one match this season," says Gavaskar, "but we are all hoping that his slide was just a bad dream. He's a great player. There's no question about that."

THE INCLUSION of Yadav means that the selectors are not taking any chances on being dependant on spinners or the pace attack. The Pakistan-bound team has four players capable of handling the new ball with Kapil. Chetan Sharma who seems to have much more control over his line and length than was in evidence last season. Old reliable Madan Lal who still looks capable of troubling the batsmen if he gets a wicket to his liking. Roger Binny who is turning into an all-rounder of promise and Balwinder Singh Sandhu who bowled with authority and guile in the pre-selection matches to take the highest number of wickets.

The spinning department is equally well-staffed with Shastri, Maninder Singh, Yadav and, at a pinch, Amarnath. Maninder is a vastly improved bowler as was evident in his recent matches and Yadav has the experience to make his contribution count. But much of the team's success will rest on the frail shoulders of Ravi Shastri. Having established his authority as a bowler, Shastri has been concentrating with intensity on his batting. The result has been an encouraging sign for Indian cricket with Shastri now a clearly accomplished batsman capable of rescuing the side from the ignominy of a collapse.

BHAWAN SINGH



Kapil (above) and the Indian probables at practice: taking sides?

His selection as captain to lead the Rest of India side in the trial matches is a clear indication that he has a maturity far beyond his young years and is being groomed to step into the captain's boots.

Gavaskar calls it a 'well-balanced' side, rich in experience and is obviously satisfied with the selector's choice. He does, however, have his reservations about Chetan Sharma, the new hope of Indian cricket. "This will be his real test," says Gavaskar. "we will have to see how he adapts to international-level cricket."

The one disappointment is the omission of the dashing Hyderabad bat, Azharuddin. Though he only had one long knock in the four innings he played in the pre-selection run-up, that was enough to proclaim his potential. He has a wide range of attacking strokes specially on the on side. Gavaskar, however, feels it is "still too early to blood him" but admits that he is impressed with his temperament.

The one-day clashes against Australia which began last week, will hardly be of much interest except as a warming up exercise for the battle against Pakistan and later, a badly demoralised English side.

But the Australian clash did produce its own firework even before a ball had been bowled when it was discovered that the proceeds of the first encounter in New Delhi would be going to the exclusive Doon School instead of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund as originally envisaged. Angry letters poured into newspaper offices when it was learnt that pressure had been brought to bear on the Delhi District Cricket Association from 1, Akbar Road to make the change. And it is literally, no small change. The estimated proceeds from the match is in the region of Rs 70 lakh.

But back on the cricketing field, it is obvious that the Pakistan tour will undoubtedly be the real test. For Gavaskar, to reassert his control over the team. For the final eleven to break the voodoo of 29 Tests on the trot without a win. And, for the selectors to justify their confidence in opting for experience over experimentation.

—DILIP BOBB

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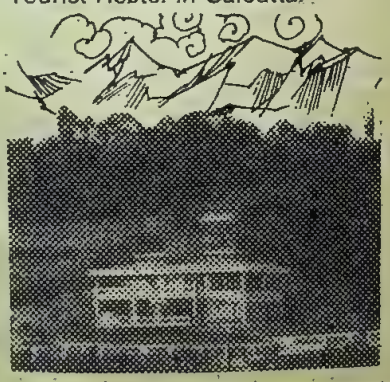
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Government of West Bengal

SOUTH ASIAN GAMES

Gold Comfort

MEDALLESS at the Los Angeles Olympics, India could draw at least some satisfaction at seeing its largely second-string squad return with a bagful of medals (88 in all) from the first South Asian Federation Games held at Kathmandu last fortnight. That little Sri Lanka with a tally of 34 medals was second was indication enough that India didn't try enough to go all out to refurbish the image of sports in India. It did not field a team in football as indeed any participants in many of the events. Yet the exultation remained—not so much over records that were not attained but over the fact that the games brought together people from countries that are often politically alienated from one another.

Months of meticulous planning and preparation preceded the six-day meet in Kathmandu. The overcast clouds cleared as King Birendra opened the games amid thunderous applause from some 30,000 people present. After an impressive march-past by the seven-nation participants, a medley of dancers from the kingdom's various regions weaved and bobbed around the stadium and over 8,000 schoolchildren thrilled the spectators with a rare display of calisthenics. The loudest cheer came at the end of a spirited exercise by Nepalese policemen. Dressed in white trousers, the group executed their drill with clockwork precision seemingly oblivious of the ankle-deep slush on the ground.

When the games ended six days later India expectedly walked away with the highest haul of medals: 44 gold, 28 silver and 16 bronze. But as the games progressed, it became increasingly evident that despite the Indian team's depth, it certainly wasn't going to be an easy walkover for the region's biggest sporting nation. Both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh put up spirited challenges in sprint events and the Nepalese dominated the middle and long distance events. Particularly impressive were the lithe women athletes of Sri Lanka in the sprint events. They bagged gold in both the 100 m and 200 m.

A Bangladeshi athlete picked gold in the 200 m event as its foursome did in the 4x100 m relay. India's nine-time national champion Adille Sumariwalla, 26, was crowned the 'sprint king' for winning the 100 m event but in a dismal time of 11.1 seconds, well below his career best 10.4 seconds. "Seven o'clock on a cool, foggy morning just isn't the right time to run the 100 m," he told INDIA TODAY, "but I must admit, I was out of form since I was suddenly called for the games." Except for Sumariwalla and Shiny Abraham (gold medallist in 400 m), there were none who could set the tracks ablaze. Still, pitted against the low standards of athletes of the neighbouring countries, Indian athletes picked up medals in all track and field events, the sorrowful exception being the triple jump where Asian bronze medallist S. Balasubramaniam fouled all his six attempts.

Though India won most of the gold medals in the middle and long distance races, Nepal too put up a creditable show. Nepalese track star Baikuntha Manadhar—45th at the Los Angeles Olympics and 5th at the Asian Games— effortlessly won the gruelling marathon in 2 hrs 27 min and 10 sec. The race turned out to be Manadhar's and Nepal's moment of glory: it was the host nation's first gold at the meet. When Manadhar built up an unbridgeable lead of 2 km over team-mate Arjun Pandit, Kathmanduites lined the streets in thousands to applaud the victor to the finishing line. India's entry in the event, Joginder Singh, came third.

Nowhere else was Indian superiority more evident than in the swimming events. Except for a token challenge from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, India had a field day. Teenager Bula Chowdhury powered her way to win her and India's first gold medal at the games in the 200 m butterfly event. She went on to win three more gold medals and Khazan Singh made history by winning no less than eight gold medals at the meet. He surpassed the Indian record in the 100 m freestyle event when he clocked 55.34 sec.

Aside from football in which India and Pakistan did not participate (Nepal beat Bangladesh 4-2 in a thrilling encounter on the last day of the games), the boxing arena drew the most spirited response from the local spectators. A partisan crowd applauded every punch by Nepali boxers. Egged on, the kingdom's boxers notched up nine medals against India's five and Pakistan's four. India's weight-lifters wrapped up all but one of the gold medals.

No less important was the organisational effort. Virtually every visiting athlete and team manager agreed that the Nepalese had done a commendable job. Sports analysts promptly singled out the prime mover Sharad Chandra Shaha, the president of the Nepal Olympic Committee for praise. The most remarkable achievement of the meet has been the bringing together of people from seven nations racked by political tensions and mutual suspicion. Rare camaraderie among the participants was evident at all sporting events. Boxers embraced each other, track stars lifted arms locked in unison at victory stands, athletes and team officials posed for group photographs to take back home. As Sumariwalla put it: "We were badly in need of a sports meet like this to bring the people together."





GOPAL CHITRAKAR

Indian swimmers Bula Chowdhury (left) and Khazan Singh: expected superiority

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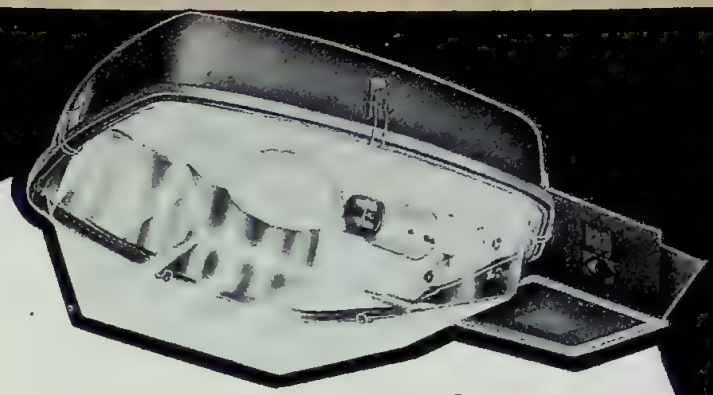
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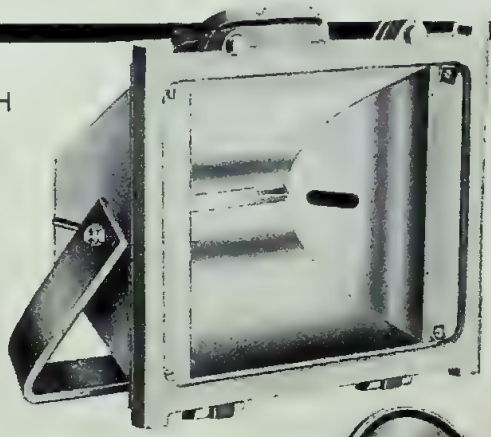


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BANGALORE

The Suicide City

BARELY a year ago, Bangalore, India's fastest growing metropolis, had earned the title of 'Boom City'. By last month, a more appropriate title would clearly have been 'Doom City'. Figures collated for the first half of the year, shocked members of the state legislature were told, gave Bangalore the dubious distinction of registering the highest number of suicides in the country— an incredible 664 suicide deaths over a six-month period, which is higher than the total combined figures for Calcutta and Hyderabad in the last three years and more than double that of Madras, the city with the second highest suicide rate this year (278 till June).

More worrying is the fact that the trend is hardly a new one. The suicide figures for Bangalore were 690 in 1981, 718 in 1982 and 754 in 1983 and experts feel that this year, the final toll is likely to cross the 1,000 mark, beating the previous record for the city which was 954 in 1978. That year, comparable statistics were, Delhi:189, Bombay:186, Calcutta:29, and Madras:148.

But what is puzzling researchers and psychologists is the fact that there seems to be no overriding reason that makes Bangalore more suicide-prone than any other city in the country. This, despite the fact that because of the high suicide rate, the biggest number of studies on suicides have been conducted in Bangalore.

A study of attempted suicide cases undertaken by a voluntary agency, established that out of 595 cases for which definite reasons were identified, marital disharmony and family tensions accounted for 163, followed by unemployment and poverty (125), medical problems (73), mental disorders(43), broken love affairs (31), alcoholism and drug addiction (19) and failure in examinations (8).

However, most experts in Bangalore tend to agree that though studies so far have not conclusively established the fact, there is some connection between the city's abnormal growth and its high incidence of suicides.

Certainly, Bangalore's urban boom has wrought drastic changes in a city that used to be known as the pensioners' paradise not so long ago. Soaring prices, specially in land and housing, increased strain of adjusting to an accelerated and more materialistic pace of life, greater competitiveness and the rapid growth in population have all combined to make the transition period an extremely painful one. Says Dr K.Sathyavathi, assistant professor of clinical psychology at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS): "The institutions meant to cater to the psychological, social and physical well-being of the society have not kept pace with the growth in population. Bangaloreans no longer know how to cope with the problem."

There is also the problem of the sudden erosion of traditional value systems which are yet to be replaced by modern alternatives. Says Sathyavathi: "The intra-family problems are often exacerbated by the nebulous character of a modern family which is a nuclear one residentially but a joint one operationally." In the 1970s, the most common suicide causes were chronic mental and physical illnesses. Today, the leaders are family tensions and marital discord. Another significant cause is the easier availability of suicide aids like poisons. Earlier, the most common methods of suicide used to be hanging or drowning. In a study by suicide prevention volunteers in 1980, poison accounted for 380 out of 466 cases examined.

Alarm bells started ringing in Bangalore as far back as 1972 when suicide prevention work formally began with the establishment of the Medico Pastoral Association (MPA), a voluntary organisation. The association runs the only 'half-way home' in the country as a temporary refuge to help cured mental and psychiatric patients to adjust to normal life as well as for people who have attempted suicide. The major service it provides, however, is through training programmes for volunteers. So far, over 350 volunteers have been trained by MPA experts. Unfortunately, the results have been far from satisfactory since only a handful are still active in visiting hospitals to counsel and guide people recovering from suicide attempts.

But the association has recently tried to redress the balance. Last fortnight, all MPA volunteers met to assess and evaluate their performance and to chalk out a more efficient programme. Others in the field are also gearing up to face the growing problem. According to its Director, Narayana Reddy, NIMHANS is planning to take up an intensive five-year child mental health programme. "It will be an attempt to inculcate a strong coping mechanism in the younger generation," he says. Adds Dr G.G. Prabhu, head of the NIMHANS clinical psychology department, "People must realise suicide is an act of aggression against oneself." But despite the belated awakening, the question remains: why are suicide figures higher in Bangalore than anywhere else in the country? Till the answer is arrived at and adequate preventive measures devised, Bangalore will have to get used to its new sobriquet of Suicide City.

—K.BHANUMATHI

MPA volunteers counselling suicide attempt cases (below) and vocational training for cured mental patients: uphill task

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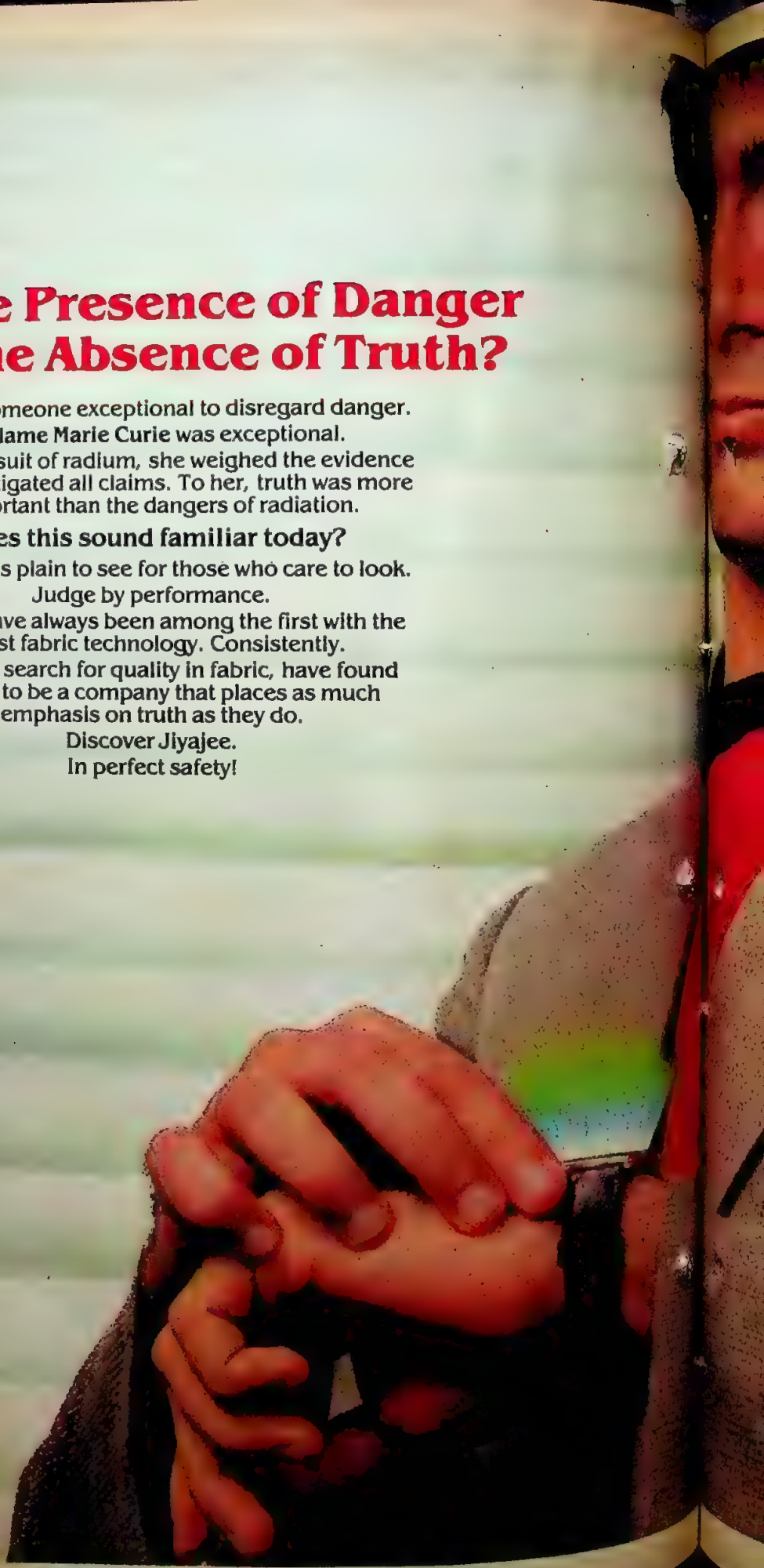
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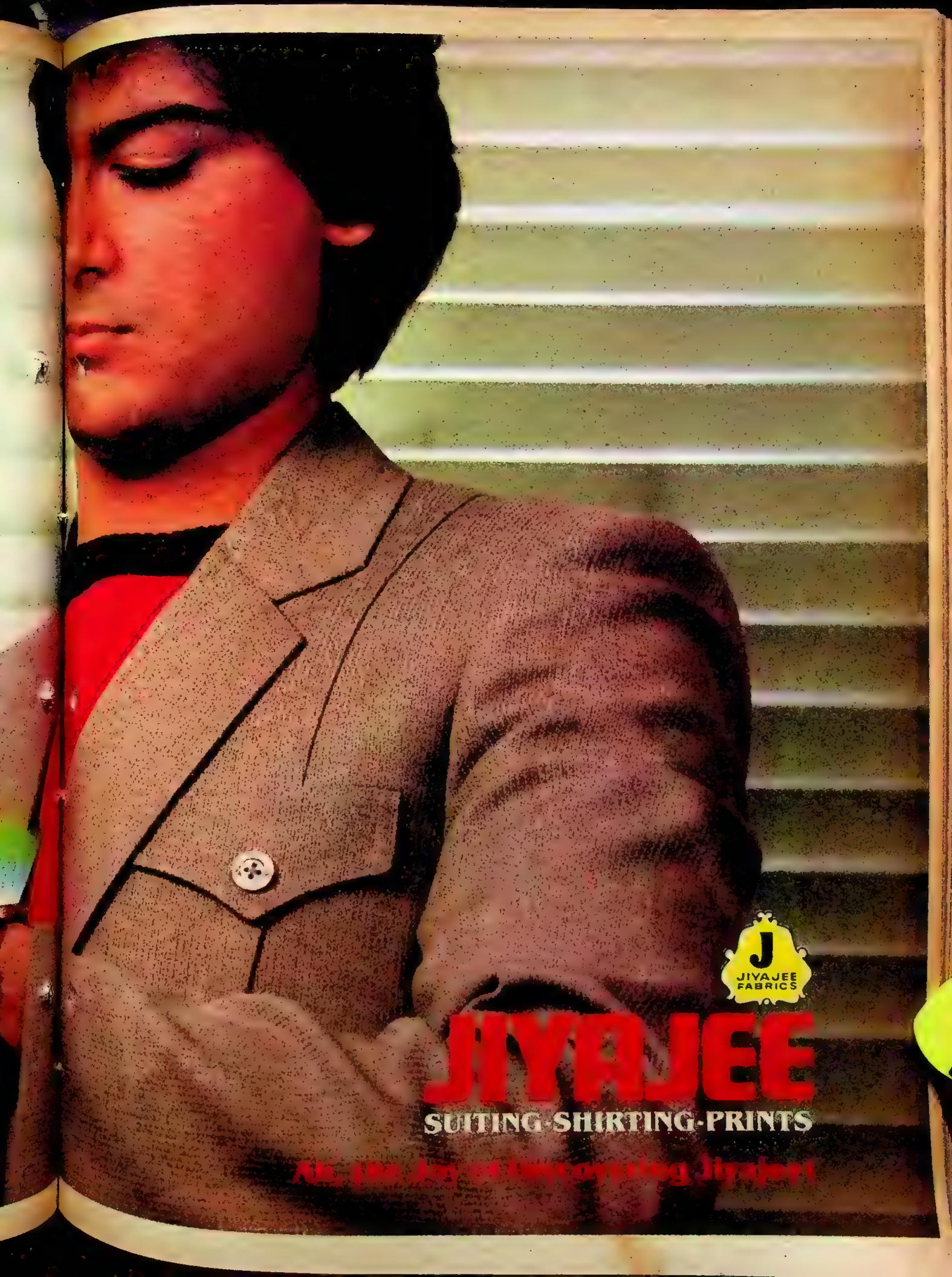
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NAINITAL

The Ravaged Resort

THE PICTURESQUE resort of Nainital in the Kumaon hills is rapidly going the way of most hill stations in the country. Not so long ago the place was synonymous with placid lakes, azure skies, clean air and above all, peace and quiet. All this has been effectively destroyed today. Nainital is virtually bursting at the seams with an increasing number of tourists, and consequently a spate of unauthorised constructions. To top it all, in the face of the resultant acute shortage of water and drainage facilities, the Uttar Pradesh Housing Board proposes to set up a housing complex.

The worst affected has been the Nainital lake. A study conducted by the Kumaon University showed that the lake which supplies water to the town is heavily polluted with dangerous concentrations of manganese and lead. The amount of phosphates and nitrates in the lake has risen from 19 micrograms per 100 ml of water in 1954 to an alarming 200 micrograms at present. This encourages the growth of algae which reduces the oxygen content of the water. Dead and decaying fish floating on the surface of the lake is a common sight in winter. Worst of all, the study showed the presence of 5,000 faecal organisms per 100 ml of water as against the acceptable limit of 100 organisms laid down by the Indian Council of Medical Research.

The lake faces further assault in the form of heavy erosion from the surrounding hills. Siltation as a result of indiscriminate deforestation has reduced the depth of the lake from 97 feet to 70 within a few years. With the siltation rate rising in geometric progression every year, the lake will be reduced to a marsh within a few decades. Identifying the chief cause, a retired forest official in Nainital L.D. Bhatt says: "Before Independence, the British used to impose stiff fines on those who cut trees here. Even today the system exists—but nobody is ever fined. Between 1950 and 1970 municipal and forest records show that over 30,000 trees have been felled in the valley, but not a single defaulter has been penalised."

Deforestation is the direct result of a construction blitz which threatens to inundate Nainital with an ugly rash of residential, commercial and office buildings. The boom in the building business has resulted in a more dangerous form of pollution—that of sewage. Built 60 years ago by the British, Nainital's drainage system was designed to serve a population of 7,000. Today the town has more than 30,000 inhabitants and during the tourist season the figure rises to 75,000. Builders have taken the easy way out by allowing the waste to flow into the lake. This has naturally brought in its wake different types of diseases like hepatitis, dysentery and enteric fever.

Polluted lakeside (below) and a rash of buildings in Nainital: down the drain

BHAWAN SINGH



BHAWAN SINGH



State government agencies too have contributed their share to the damage. In the last 12 years, there has been a mushrooming of government offices. Apart from living in a salubrious climate, an added attraction for government employees is the lucrative income from subletting residential accommodation to tourists at exorbitant rates.

The long-neglected environmental problems of Nainital came in for some attention only when early this year the Uttar Pradesh Housing Board began implementing its ambitious housing project to construct 180 houses and in phases to follow, another 400. The Himalayan Environment Association (HEA) and other small environment groups rose in protest. When their letters to the concerned authorities got them nowhere, a group of environmentalists led by Akshobh Singh, joint secretary of HEA, proceeded to fill the foundation pits dug by the board. This stalled the construction but it remains to be seen whether future constructions will be deterred.

Even though the scheme will place a severe strain on the existing infrastructure like water, drainage and electricity, former district magistrate, R.B. Bhaskar is of the opinion that the Government has no choice when faced with the acute housing shortage. According to him: "If any such scheme came up, the rental value of existing houses would fall drastically and it is mainly being opposed by vested interests who have houses to rent or are losing land." Adds Ramsingh Bist, a boatman: "All those opposing the scheme are rich. Do they know how the poor live? We have to live in hovels paying high rents."

While they are not far wrong in their contention, the fact still remains that having massive housing complexes will destroy the beauty of the hill station permanently. And so far, apart from a few environmental activists, not many people seem particularly bothered about the sorry state of affairs.

—RAMESH MENON in Nainital

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MUSIC

Discordant Notes

WITH characteristic style and flamboyance, Zubin Mehta, music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, bade farewell to the city of his birth last fornight. For his last concert in Bombay, he discarded his formal dress suit for a traditional Parsi *sadri* (muslin coat) while conducting his final encore of *Stars and Stripes* to a wildly cheering audience. The audience—an overwhelming majority of whom were his fellow-Parsis decked up in Chinese silks, chiffons, diamonds and pearls—cheered "Bravo Zubin" full-throatedly while realising that the emotion-charged final concert almost didn't take place. On the morning of the concert, an anonymous call warned the Gujarati newspaper *Jam-e-Jamshed* that a bomb had been planted at the Shanmukhananda Hall where the orchestra was to play.

The bomb threat—which mercifully turned out to be fake—caused the jittery musicians enough fright to refuse to perform at the last minute. The Bombay organisers, a 50-year-old charitable women's association called the Time and Talents Club roped in Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro to reassure the musicians that there was no danger. The anonymous caller, who claimed to be a member of the Black September group, had said that the bomb was planted to protest against Mehta's Jewish "leanings". Mehta is conductor of the Israeli Philharmonic as well, and the concert featured three Jewish composers: George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copeland. But with the protection of a squad of plainclothesmen of the Bombay police, and later more uniformed police on guard, the concert got underway, though 45 minutes late. Yet 20 of the musicians refused to perform at any cost. They were not missed: the usually keen eared Bombay critics did not notice that the orchestra wasn't playing at full strength.

If the bomb scare had struck a discordant note in an otherwise triumphant concert tour, there had been a few earlier signs of disharmony as well. At the tumultuous reception at Bombay airport for the orchestra, Mehta's mother Tehmina, who had flown down from Los Angeles, was on hand to welcome him with the traditional *aachoo michoo* ceremony to ward away evil spirits. Mehta's feet were washed, and a kumkum put on his forehead. With Zubin fever raging through the city, billboards and hoardings everywhere screamed out a welcome. "The orchestra is going to love this," said Zubin as he was whisked away in a Rolls-Royce. Not all of them did. Some members of the orchestra refused to come out of the coach to be garlanded. An eager member of the reception committee said the kumkum was a symbol of "togetherness". "We have had enough togetherness, thank you," was the curt response.



Mehta presenting Mrs Gandhi a cheque for Rs 5.92 lakh, the proceeds of the concerts, on the day of his departure

Earlier in Delhi, there had been a "cockroach uproar" in the India Tourism Development Corporation-run five-star Ashok Hotel. Some 60 members of the orchestra walked out of the hotel complaining that the rooms were not up to the standard. They claimed the rooms were dirty, smelly and infested with insects. In fact one musician, Sally Saxon, was said to be so overcome at the sight of a cockroach that she broke down and wept on Mehta's shoulder. Sniffed another member: "We are accustomed to staying in hotels like the Oriental in Bangkok and Mandarin in Singapore." Albert Webster, managing director of the orchestra, said the complaints were far more serious than about the presence of a cockroach for. "We have plenty of those in America." He said the young lady who had burst into tears was in fact emotionally upset because she had just received a letter from home saying her grandmother was very ill.

Another touch of the bizarre came when *The Times of India* carried a letter from a Nancy Mehta protesting at the extravagance of a country like India spending lakhs of rupees to bring in the orchestra when most people in the country did not appreciate the kind of music it played. Aghast Indian officials were mollified to discover that the writer was in fact a Parsi lady from Delhi who just happened to have the same name as Zubin Mehta's wife.

On the whole, however, the concert tour was an undoubted success. The grumblers in the orchestra, whether provoked by the state of affairs in Ashok Hotel or the welcome at Bombay airport, were clearly in a minority. Most of the musicians were in fact charmed by Indian hospitality. "India is a dream," said second violinist Alexander Bodin. Concert Master Glenn Dicterow insisted: "Everything is going perfectly." The orchestra was particularly touched by the ICCR's gesture in arranging for the old British luxury train, the Great Indian Rover to take its members from Delhi to Agra to see the Taj Mahal by moonlight. Another exotic touch was a dinner hosted by Mehta at the Parsi fire temple where a typical eight-course Parsi wedding feast was served on banana leaves.

Though the ICCR spent around Rs 20 lakh on the orchestra's transport and stay within the country, concert hall bookings and other expenditure, it hopes to recoup Rs 18 lakh from tickets and advertisers. Most of the expenses of the Time and Talents Club in Bombay were met by the Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company. The orchestra itself waived its concert fees for the five performances in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi although it normally charges $45,000 (Rs 5.3 lakh) per concert. Said Webster: "In a very real sense, we are a gift to India." The orchestra will actually lose $50,000 on its three-week tour of Asia despite the fact that the Citibank is footing a third of the roughly $2.7 million (Rs 3.1 crore) bill of the tour. And to those who still complained that the exorbitantly priced tickets were basically only for a small elite, Mehta pointed out that an estimated 20 million people all over the country watched the orchestra's performance on TV. Said he: "It was a journey of discovery for many in the country."

—COOMI KAPOOR



NATIONAL MUSEUM

The Capita

SOMETHING is happening to the National Museum in New Delhi. After years of neglect, disinterest and decay, even passersby driving past the imposing sandstone facade of the building turn their heads to stare: a smart new railing has come up around the complex, a new garden is being planted and, for once, the brass lettering at the doors shows because it is shining bright. Visitors who care to walk into the marble-floored, domed foyer of the museum no longer shrink back in shame: gone is the dingy, despairing look made more intolerable by the pervasive stench from a nearby toilet.

Instead, scrubbed, polished and beautifully lit, the foyer has reverted to its original scope of grandeur. Together with the main corridor it has been effectively transformed into an impromptu gallery, displaying 45 masterpieces of ancient Indian sculpture in stone. Here, together for the first time, are masterworks culled from museums as far apart as Mathura, Patna, Konarak and Calcutta. They have no thematic or chronological unity, but are there simply because someone, mercifully, thought they were good enough for the public to see.

And they contain pieces reproduced mostly in photographs: the famous



(From left) "Chauri Bearer" (3rd century); standing Buddha (5th century); Gajendra Moksha from Deogarh (6th century) and Dr Sihare

Showpiece

"Woman Writing a Letter" (11th century; Chandela period) from Khajuraho, for example; or the "Standing Buddha" (1st-2nd century; Kushan period) from the Mathura Museum; or the mesmeric torso of the other Standing Buddha from the Gupta period (5th century), a headless wonder if there ever was one: the undulating lines of its robe contain the essence of its graphic mastery. And here, too, is possibly the greatest tribute to Indian womanhood in stone: the fabulous "Chauri Bearer" from the Mauryan period (3rd century B.C.) which belongs to the Patna Museum. Placed in the centre of the hall, directly under the domed entrance, its buff-coloured tones of highly polished Chunar stone glow with an incandescence that suggests that it was carved yesterday; its bejewelled form of full-breasted, small-waisted proportion capture the ideal of feminine beauty in India.



But as important as the collection on display is the detail of its presentation: cleanly imprinted captions and a useful photographic catalogue tells viewers what to look for; cleverly placed mirrors at the back of sculptures facilitate scholars to study the pieces from all angles; and additional facilities such as opening up of the museum library to the general public and a cleaning up of the museum bookshop signify nothing short of a revolution in what is undoubtedly India's premier repository of art and antiquity.

The question to ask, of course, is how this has come about. And the answer is briefly to be found in the fact that after three years of being headless, the National Museum has found a director. The choice could hardly have been more fortuitous for all. Dr Laxmi P. Sihare, formerly director of the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi took over in April: a veritable dynamo of energy, commitment and good taste, he intends to do much more than what he achieved at the National Gallery which was similarly going to ruin before his arrival; he is now determined to convert the National Museum into what it should be: the centre of attraction in an otherwise artless city.

Beginning with the present exhibition of rare sculpture—which he insisted be displayed in New Delhi on its return from a six-month tour of Japan—he has managed to negotiate a rare exhibition from a western country. The masterpieces of the Dresden Museum show, which will go on display from November through February at the National Museum, will be the first foreign exhibition to contain paintings by such a glittering array of European masters: originals by Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Tintoretto will be open to Indian art lovers just as the masterpieces of French sculptor Auguste Rodin were shown at the National Gallery last year. That show —for which Sihare laboriously negotiated for months—will be followed by an exhibition on the masterpieces in the collection of the National Museum itself.

Photographs by RAGHU RAI



Sihare has asked each of the museum's ten departmental curators to choose the best from their sections: 360 pieces of the best in painting, sculpture, textiles, jewellery, weaponry and artefacts from Central Asia and South America that fill the museum's coffers will go to show. For years, no such exhibition has taken place because earlier directors of the National Museum were either beset by practical problems of display and security or, being dedicated academics, were too busy penning their learned writings while incarcerated in their offices.

Sihare has succeeded in opening up the museum: he's mobilised the staff of 341 into action "there were 29 sweepers when I arrived but they couldn't keep the toilets clean" and commandeered the funds at the museum's disposal. A large part of the National Museum's Rs 1 crore-a-year outlay used to be surrendered unused, and Sihare has found use for expenditure. He's opened up the galleries on the upper floors, cleaned out the conservation department, installed the latest in electrical track lighting and three-inch thick bullet-proof glass for the more notable or valuable exhibits.

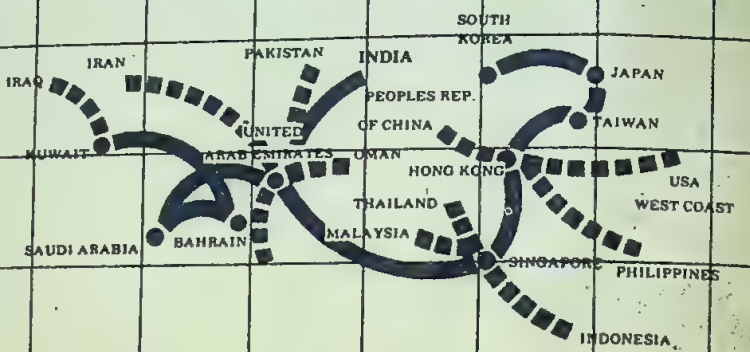
Part of the museum's problems lie in the dysfunctional aspects of the mammoth building, built around an open circular courtyard with open verandahs leading into the galleries. This brought in floods of rainwater during the monsoon and swarms of homing pigeons throughout the year so that, at any given time, a visitor's view of some ancient marvel was likely to be obscured by layers of bird droppings. Sihare, and the museum's Assistant Director, I.D. Mathur are devising permanent plate glass doors that will screen the open verandahs and seeking professional advice on how to prevent the rainwater from seeping into the building's basement that stores many of its treasures.

And given their plans to generate a revival of the National Museum, what was arguably India's most disorderly cultural storehouse may, with some effort, become its primary show-piece. —SUNIL SETHI

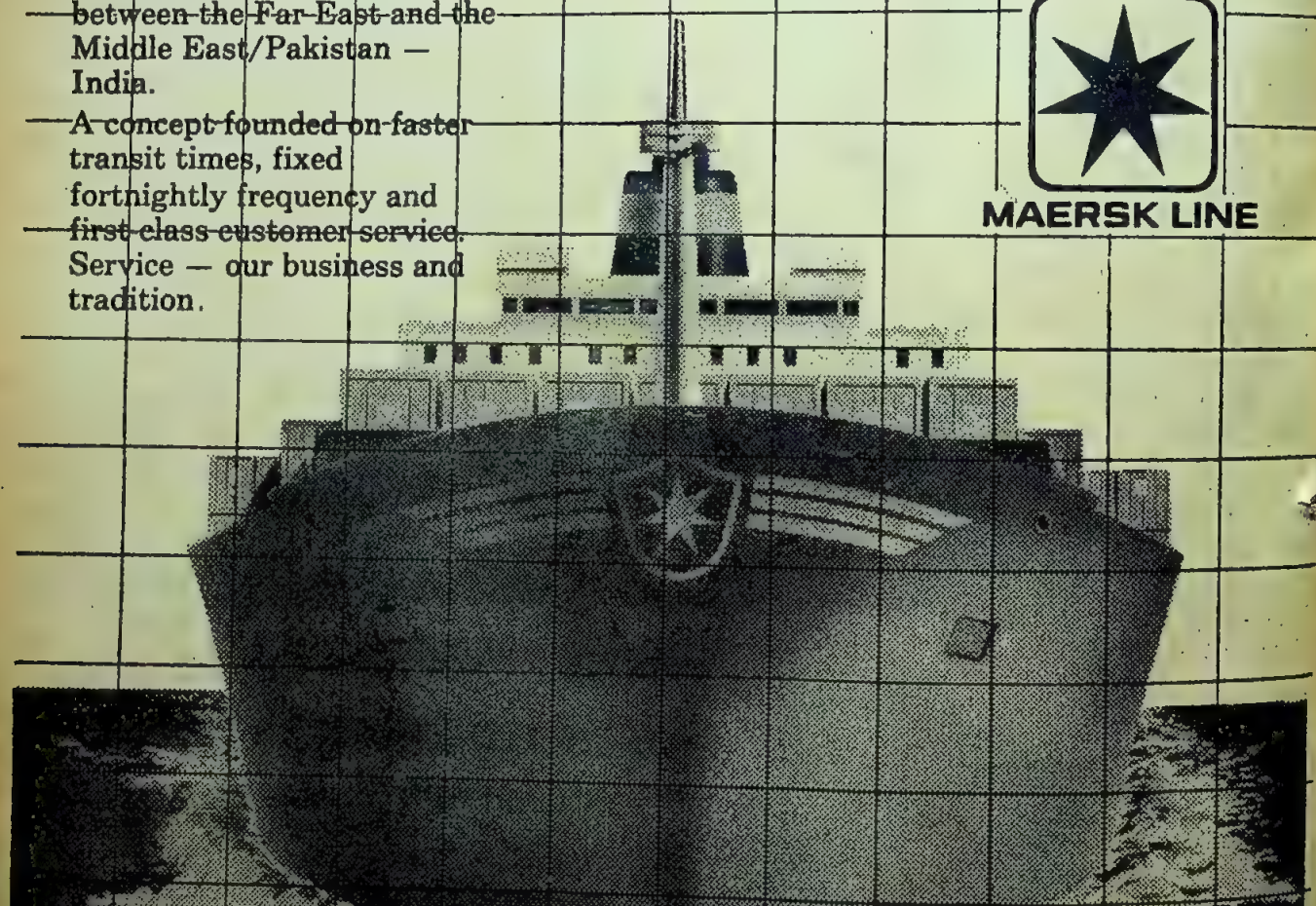
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Long Playing Record

A LONG time back, in 1965, a young man sat under a street lamp in one of Hyderabad's poorer *galis* and cried his heart out. His seven brothers and sisters had all died of hunger and disease and poverty, and only he, the youngest, was left. Under that street lamp, Babban Khan, then 20 years old, took a piece of paper and began to pour out his troubles. But what was emerging was comedy—pure, unadulterated fun about the woes of a large family. What took root in that seedy colony became a world famous play—*Adrak Ke Panje*. And recently, the playwright, director, actor received a rare honour: the 1984 *Guinness Book of Records* proclaimed Babban Khan's play—with its 5,351 performances—as the world's longest run one-man show ever. Said Khan: "When I heard the news, for an hour I was numb. And then my happiness knew no bounds."

Babban Khan has come a long, long way. And gone a long, long way too. He has staged *Adrak Ke Panje* in 64 cities of India several times, and in 18 countries around the globe three times over. In 1982, when he booked the capital's Mavalankar Hall for 30 shows, tickets for all shows were sold out one week in advance. He has had packed shows in Japan's 500-year-old Kabuki theatre, double bills in the US with Anthony Quinn in *Zorba The Greek* and Yul Brynner in *The King And I*. His tickets in Los Angeles' posh Beverley Hills area sell for up to a hundred dollars each, although in India he keeps the price down to Rs 5 and Rs 3. For a play whose entire sets cost only Rs 650, Khan has paid Rs 40 lakh as income tax. And in the same city where he lived in a hovel with his 10-member large family, Babban Khan owns an eight bedroom bungalow, with wall-to-wall carpeting, mirrors that reach up to the ceilings and a neat little Volkswagen Beetle parked in the garage.

But with success stories like that, usually comes a cruel change of heart. Not for Babban Khan. "Money is all that's changed," he says humbly, "my bungalow is really too big for me." The man still wanders into the streets of Paris and Istanbul and Tokyo wearing a sentimental 20-year-old sherwani, shabby rubber chapals and clutching on to an aluminium tiffin-box. *Adrak Ke Panje*—literally meaning ginger roots or unplanned family—has remained the same, centering around a poor clerk with eight children, an unmanageable number of guests that keep dropping into his crowded home, and of course, the not so subtle message in the end that too many kids spoil the broth. "There is so much humour in it," says Khan, "that every other minute we have to stop the play to let the people laugh."

A poster announcing Khan in Paris and (below) a scene from *Adrak Ke Panje*: international applause





Laughter is about all the play can boast of. It has no lavish sets, no music, no special effects. Its props—Dalda tins, a broken down *charpai*, some tattered old cushions, "and if anything breaks en route somewhere, it only becomes a highlight of the play," says Khan. And yet this one man continues to pull in the audiences the world over with a single poster splashed in bold red letters: "Babban Khan in your town." The people who come are both Indians and foreigners. He has had shows where the entire audience has been English or French. The dialogues are—via computer—simultaneously translated into six different languages. "Maybe people come because they are curious," Khan says modestly. And yet over 128 international newspapers have written about him and Jack Kroll from *Newsweek* proclaimed the play as "a miracle."

Well, it is certainly no less than a miracle. For the very first performance on September 22, 1965, Khan had no money. So he sold his mother's gold *mangalsutra* for Rs 275. The show was a financial loss but the laughs had come at the right time. The second performance, managed on loans, brought in a Rs 600 profit. And then—the money kept rolling in. Khan never sold television, video or film rights despite many offers to do so. But the Government, which should have lauded him on promoting its pet family planning theme, has kept mysteriously silent.

Once in San Francisco, after seeing *Adrak Ke Panje*, an excited Francis *(Godfather)* Coppola came up to Khan and suggested that he write another play that would run on the success of the first one. Khan decided to follow that advice and *Adrak Ke Panje Part II* is now ready. Like its successful predecessor, it is a one-act play, has the same kind of ramshackle sets and a social theme—corruption—where again Khan dares to find humour. And if it does turn out to be anything like its predecessor, the applause should never stop.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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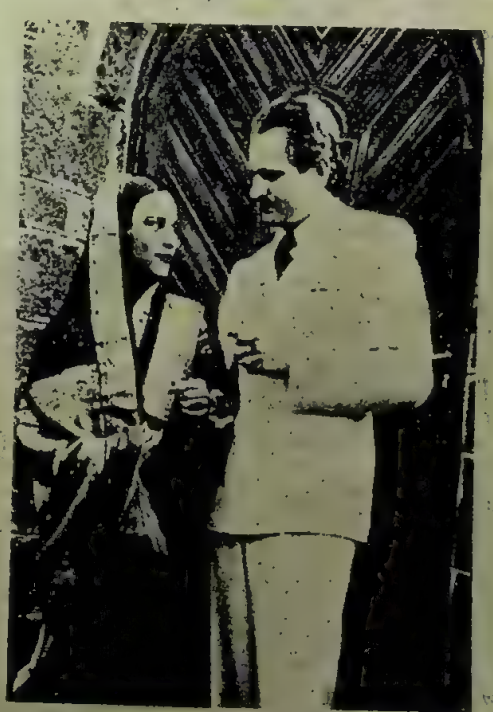
"I WONDER what you'll say when I die?," Amrita Sher-Gil asked Iqbal Singh a fortnight before her tragic and unexpected death. Here, 40 years later, is his answer. What would she have thought of this book? With her keen sense of the ridiculous and hatred of humbug and cliche, she would have taken wicked delight in a book that begins, "It was a delicious morn," and ends. "It was sunset". She would have raged at the mutilation of her favourite painters' names and the lines from Verlaine she sang by Vikas's omnipresent printer's devil. Most of all she would have mourned the luminous colours of her paintings, obscured in a haze of yellow sludge. "I am always hungry for colour," she used to say, quoting Van Gogh, "I want to express with greens and with reds, the terrific, the terrific human passions." But I think she would have also recognised it as a genuine labour of love, however limited, and, since she prized love and was prodigal of it herself, she would have valued it for that.

Amrita who grew up in Simla dismissed its society as "a dull, uninteresting and scandal-mongering crowd". She was irritated by their pretensions and shallowness and they were shocked by her. It was a world which prided itself on its cosmopolitan culture and sophistication but was very much dominated by the social conventions of the time. Painting was a nice hobby for a young girl but one shouldn't get too intense about it. Men were virile and women were chaste and if occasionally the women, perforce, had to be a little less than chaste in order to prove the men virile, the liaison had to be conducted with utmost discretion. Discretion, deceit of any kind, was anathema to Amrita. She was fiercely open. Her letters to Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted in the book, exemplify this. Her self in Simla's staid society, her flaming sari, parrot green and gold brocades, chunky silver jewellery and sleeveless blouses were only outward manifestations of a new kind of painting, a new kind of woman, and a new kind of living. She had come back from Paris determined to make her home in India "feeling," as she said, "in some strange inexplicable way that there lay my destiny as a painter". She knew instinctively that in painting India "desolate, yet strangely beautiful" and Indians, "those silent images of infinite compassion and patience," those "angular, brown bodies, strangely beautiful in their ugliness", that she would fully realise her own unique artistic vision.

Apart from an associateship of the Grand Salon, a gold medal and a considerable reputation as a painter, Amrita's European experience had included numerous lovers, abortions, venereal disease, an experiment with lesbianism, many deep friendships and an engagement to her cousin, Victor Egan. Her extraordinary relationship with him; its total honesty and total security (she told him everything about her, he arranged her abortions and she married him while pregnant by another man) gave her great strength as she fought the artistic and social prejudices of Indian society, as well as the conflicts within herself.

She was a sybarite who loved music, good food, bridge, ballroom dancing and beautiful clothes but she worked with fierce intensity and a conviction of her own genius. In pursuit of this she was ruthless, putting up with second-rate painters like Barada Ukil who loved her but was all she despised, because he promised to promote and sell her work. She longed for a "life of sensation" and, while never consciously trying herself to be sensational, her determination to seize every experience—visual, physical, emotional and intellectual—and her frankness and passion for truth inevitably created it. Iqbal Singh tells a characteristic story of an example of both these traits. She unhesitatingly accepted the embraces of an unknown German who leapt in at her window while she lay by the fire one evening, but then rejected further acquaintance on meeting him later because she found him a bore! Even Malcolm Muggeridge, supposedly iconoclast, unconventional, intellectual, found her bewilderingly her own woman, and was alternately attracted and repelled; she did not merely enchant him but drove him mad and he seems to have found the sensation uncomfortable.

Amrita with husband Victor Egan



Iqbal Singh is a master of the hackneyed phrase—midnight is "the bewitched hour," wars "rage in fury," admirers "cluster like moths around a flame," Amrita "could therefore plunge herself into the social life of Paris more or less straightaway," all in paragraphs that begin "coincidentally enough", take "a different turn" and "thus end," usually with an exclamation mark. However, he has done an enormous amount of work. He has read up Hungarian history and the art world of Paris in the '20s and '30s, dug up old newspaper files and boxes of letters and interviewed literally hundreds of people. One would be grateful to him just for the sheer pleasure of Amrita's own vivid and original prose and the glimpses of her wit, and insights into the state of Indian art, Indian society and her own mind.

He also provides a clear chronology of her life and work and the tragic circumstances of her death, hitherto veiled in mystery and often scurrilous speculation. Sometimes one wishes that the fruits of his research had been better edited: one could have done without pages and pages of verbatim newspaper reviews which would have been better briefly paraphrased and consigned to appendices, particularly since most of them are pedestrian and unperceptive—of the "talented young thing but so gloomy" variety. And though he is an accurate and never needlessly prurient guide to the outward events of her eventful life, her journeys, fairs and exhibitions, he is sadly inadequate on the passion that made her paint, and what Geeta Kapur calls "the brooding and melancholic temperament" that lay beneath the beauty, the gaiety, and that made her favourite heroes "Beethoven, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann and Van Gogh—all in different ways painfully, intricately introspective and passionate, all partaking of a tragic consciousness". —LAILA TYABJI

◆ Once again the Hindi screen sizzled and once again evergreen hero Jeetendra performed his aerobics with a sprightly young thing. But no, "She is not Sridevi, she is Radha" screamed the colossal *Kaamyab* billboard posters about the latest, and some say sexiest, offering from the well-endowed south. Excited producers announced that she was willing to bare even more than Sridevi. Alas, despite all the publicity buildup, Radha and her thundering thighs sizzled out in her very first Hindi film. One despondent film distributor compared her to a soda water bottle which has lost its fizz while an amused film journalist reminded everyone that "the imitation is never as good as the original."



SHOWTIME

Southern starlet Radha: barely adequate

◆ Top Pakistani actor Mohammed Ali has managed something quite unique: he has got India's most tied-to-the-soil hero, Manoj Kumar to actually agree to leave his beloved country for a few months next year and come and direct a film in Pakistan. But before that, Ali and his wife Zeba will act in Manoj's film *Clerk*, being shot in Delhi over the next four months. Said Manoj: "My relationship with Mohammed Ali is that of a brother. He sent me a letter saying he would not accept a paisa. I think this kind of relationship should be a model for relations between our two countries." Now does that mean, when Mr Bharat crosses over to Pakistan next year, he won't accept a penny either?

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Maestro Amjad Ali and sons: tuning in to kids





Manoj Kumar and Mohammed Ali: brotherly love

CINE BLITZ

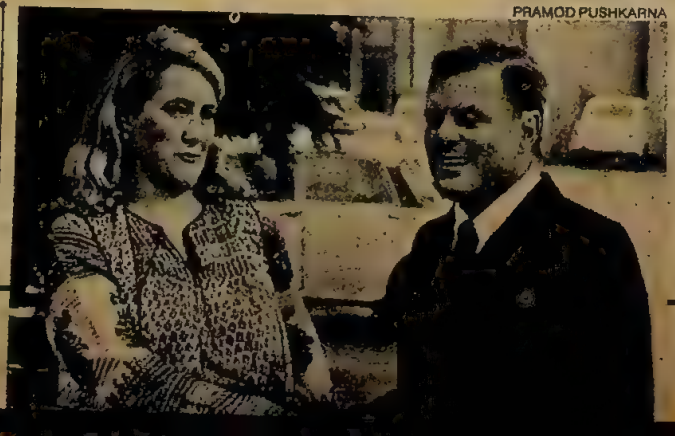




Barot and Shourie: unproductive liaison

◆ In America it is being called the wedding of the year—the solemnisation of vows between Camilla Blaffer Royall, an oil heiress from Texas and Herbert Mallard, a financier from Boston. And why not, it's not everyday that one crosses the world to get married according to a childhood fantasy. This fantasy—of a Rajput wedding—brings into the royal heart of Jaipur a bridal *baraat* of over 50 people, handpicked from the best in American and European nobility. Mallard will ride an elephant into the Sisodia Rani Palace to bring home his shy, sari-clad bride. Said Countess Bianca Lovatelli, a friend of the couple: "I guess I would love to be married in India too—and even to an Indian." Well, everyone has their fantasies but only the rich and the famous can see them come true.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Camilla and Herbert: dreamy days

◆ Chacha Nehru's birthday—and the gift will be for the kids. Slated for release on November 14 is a very special thought from sarod wizard Amjad Ali Khan: a double album of children's songs and music geared to get kids to understand the *sa-re-ga-ma* behind *Old Macdonald had a farm*. Many of the compositions are Amjad's own, "written just to amuse my children". But recorded and pressed into a double album by HMV, they also become the first ever gift from a classical musician to little children. Grinned Amjad: "People have such a different idea of sarod. They can hardly believe that it also plays *Doe-a-deer*."

◆ A lady with millions and an ambitious young man—and something is destined to happen. When Sattee Shourie signed film director Chandra Barot to direct her multi-budget, multi-star epic *Krishna*, together they promised to give the world a film to remember. A year-and-a-half and many lavish parties later, *Krishna* is still to take off. "Work is not coming, only expenses," said a disillusioned Shourie after finally sacking her spendthrift director last month. But *Krishna* is to continue, minus Barot but with an even more stupendous star cast.

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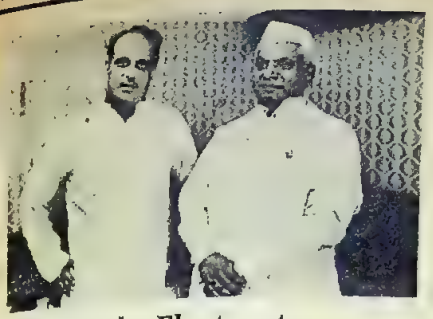
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Wooing the Electorate

With the elections looming closer and Uttar Pradesh contributing every sixth Lok Sabha seat, the country's largest state will prove electorally crucial. With the Congress(I) launching a massive campaign, the battle for Uttar Pradesh has already begun.

COVER STORY.....72



Branded Witches

Last fortnight, the People's Union for Civil Liberties submitted a memorandum to the West Bengal chief minister to arrest "witch-hunting" in Santhal villages. Alleging CPI(M) involvement, the reformers are facing political and tribal pressure.

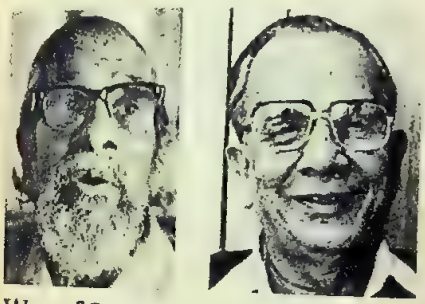
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Stilling the Voices

Activist groups have mushroomed in various districts of Tamil Nadu to mobilise rural people in a struggle for their rights. But the Government with the help of the police is cracking down ruthlessly on the groups, apparently bent on suppressing them.

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War of Succession

DCM is going through a succession battle at the top. The two brothers, Bharat Ram and Charat Ram, who control the company, have not seen eye to eye over many issues for a long time, and have now proposed rival formulae for the succession.

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Mixed Fortunes

A new quarterly forecast says the economy has gained some momentum, but sees no evidence yet of widespread economic recovery. Also introduced from this issue is a fortnightly Economy Monitor to track the economy's key sectors.

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Barriers of Bigotry

Hindu-Muslim marriages have provoked acrid passion and communal antagonism in the past and still do. The prevalance of this attitude is a clear indication of how far the secular ideals of the Constitution have been negated. A report.

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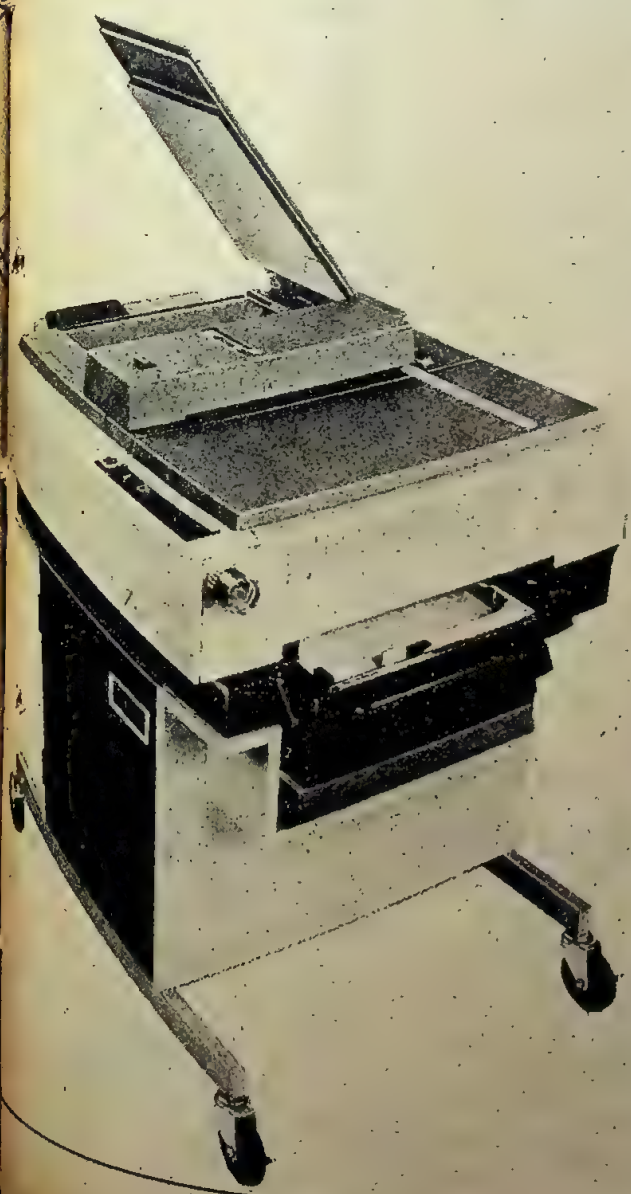
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LETTERS



RAYS OF HOPE

The restoration of the Akal Takht is the foundation on which the rehabilitation (of the Sikh community's bruised feelings) will be built. ("Punjab: Glimmer of Hope", October 15).

Punjab must push aside the roadblock of regret and allow the rays of hope to extend over a large area, so that dissension may diminish and normalcy speedily restored.

Meerut — RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

■ Handing over the Golden Temple to the SGPC is a good step toward bringing normalcy in Punjab. It is probably the first time that the ruling party, the Akali Dal and the opposition parties have shed their political ambitions and come forward to solve the Punjab problem in the interest of the country's unity.

Udaipur — AMIT KUMAR NIGAM

NO REAL CHOICE

One would agree with Charan Singh (October 15) when he says that it is Indira Gandhi who is encouraging the divisive forces in India. But then what is the choice? Singh himself is known as the Janata breaker of 1979. It is he who is responsible for spoiling the image of the Janata Party among the voters.

Agra — S.C. MATHUR

■ The interview with Charan Singh was interesting. The style and content of his answers, unfortunately, is the same that any other opposition leader adopts. It is sad that he should criticise great leaders like Nehru just because his daughter Mrs Gandhi is the leader of his "opposition" party. It is an insult to Nehru and the nation, because it is only through the efforts of leaders like him that we are leading a free and independent life.

Ludhiana — SANJAY CHOPRA

■ After Charan Singh's rapid political oscillations, one wonders at his audacity when he calls other politicians "liars". Furthermore, if any one factor can be isolated for our low standards in consumer products, it is a total lack of competition. Protecting small industries within limits is one thing; creating such misplaced complacency quite another. Has Charan Singh realised that the sudden leap we've made in consumer electronics, say, has been thanks to competition and advanced technology, apart from duty reductions? I fail to understand the concept that a return to pre-renaissance production methods can improve individual living standards.

New Delhi — PRASANTO KUMAR ROY

■ Charan Singh is right. During the last 36 years, the governments in India have mostly been helping the rich get richer and the poor, poorer. Most of the government machinery is busy processing soft loans, tax holidays, duty drawbacks, cash incentives and other concessions for the old established families.

New Delhi — JAI SINGH BIKA

EXEMPLARY CONDUCT

Thakur Sen Negi's ouster (October 15) from speakership of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly by the Congress(I), which was instrumental in electing him to the august position, only shows that the party cannot tolerate any honest, impartial independent thinking person. Negi should be congratulated for upholding the high traditions and standards of conduct expected from a person occupying such an office.

New Delhi — V. SAGAR

MISGUIDED ENTHUSIASM

The esteemed Janardhan Poojary's enthusiastic support of the bank loan scheme ("Bankers' Woes", October 15), for the unemployed and weaker sections seems full of holes. I wonder if he would still be as enthusiastic if he were told that the bank where his lifetime's savings were kept was going bankrupt. Poojary should know that it is hard-earned public money which is being thrown away to prop up his image. Surely depositors like us should have a say.

New Delhi — M.S. NEGI

UNGODLY BUSINESS

Kudos to your correspondent for exposing the misdeeds of Bishop Clemis ("Holy War", October 15). Kerala seems to be the perfect breeding ground for reli-

gious heads like Clemis, who wish to take political mileage, because each party sees them as potential vote banks which are well worth cultivating.

MINIE THOMAS
Cochin

■ The very existence of organised religion is based on the whole-hearted support of believers and if the present trend of theocratic autocracy as practised by Bishop Clemis is allowed to continue at the cost of congregational democracy, then this base will slowly but surely erode.

Trivandrum — PHILIP ABRAHAM

■ Your report deserves congratulations for having dealt with a major issue of a minority community at a remote place. These days the bishops are more interested in money rather than the welfare of the church. The report should be an eye-opener to all Christians in the country, especially to our bishops who seem to be leading a crusade to build a new church near Ranni Valiapally.

Trivandrum — M.A. KORAH

UNRELENTING STAND

With reference to your report "Escorts: New Tune" (September 30), I really do not know how you have come to the conclusion in the first paragraph. Let me clarify the position:

Mr Nanda has definitely not acted in a trustworthy fashion. He has abused the trust of the shareholders by not registering the shares which his stockholders sold to me. But, I have always seen him as a friend in the personal capacity and have never said anything different. And I have always maintained that I would be prepared to see Mr Nanda if he met me on his own, which he did when he approached me for this meeting.

My condition for any settlement remains the same as before: all my shares must be registered; no shareholder is to be treated any differently as there is no privileged class of shareholder, no siphoning off of funds from these companies, and the management must work for the company and not for any individual.

London — SWRAJ PAUL

GENUINE SCHEME

With reference to your article "Money down the drain" (September 30), I would like to point out a few things. I am one of the recipients of the loan and would like to state that this scheme is meant genuinely for the masses of the country, instead of a few hand-picked industrialists who are growing fatter by the day—on our money. Even if 10 per cent of the deserving people benefit from these loans then this scheme will be a success. As for corruption at the banks and the District Industries Centre, there is no doubt that some applicants had to pay quite a bit to grease the palms of a few District Industries Centre officials and to bank managers.

This notion that nobody is using the money properly is all your myth. Your correspondent should have checked all his facts before striking down the entire scheme.

Dehra Dun — PRADEEP SHARMA

■ It is true that DIC is the agency to receive applications from the prospective candidates. But, its authority is limited as it cannot decide things for itself, unless the other members of the committee for the implementation of this scheme also connive with the selecting of undeserving candidates. Even after this, the role of DIC is merely to recommend the names of the selected candidates to the banks who have operational jurisdiction, for consideration and disposal.

Srikakulam — B.V.R. JOGARAO

DIVIDED HOUSE

It is doubtful if the anti-Congress(I) opposition parties will come to an agreement, ("The Opposition: Disunity Moves", September 30) in the absence of any common positive programme. Even if the Opposition parties reconcile to the idea of electoral adjustments there is hardly any possibility of some alternative personality emerging as a national leader, as most of the leaders waste their time on endless bickering and politicking.

Lucknow — H.K.L. GANDOTRA

ENCOURAGING TREND

Your article "Potrait of a Perfectionist" (September 30) made very interesting reading. Kudos to Naseeruddin Shah for having won the best actor's award at the Venice Film Festival. Thanks to directors like Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen and Govind Nihalani and actors like Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri, Indian cinema is definitely miles ahead of the "heroes" of the usual formula films as far as acting is concerned.

Hyderabad — G. YEGNAPRIYA

CALLOUS NEGLECT

This refers to the article "Escape from Insanity" (September 30). The heart-rending plight of the inmates of the Ranchi Mansik Arogyashala and the callous neglect of the officer-in-charge in leaving them locked without food for 48 hours should make every decent Indian hang his head in shame. And for this gross inhumanity, the keeper of the asylum has merely been suspended. I doubt if anyone comes out of this institution cured and ripe for rehabilitation.

Bombay — K.K. SACHDEV

CALCULATED MOVE

Vasant Sathe's advocacy for presidential form of Government ("Orchestrated Debate", September 30) in the wake of trampling of parliamentary democracy in Andhra Pradesh does not bode well for the federal structure of our country. It seems whenever Mrs Gandhi becomes apprehensive of adverse verdict at the hustings, she makes up a public controversy in favour of the so-called virtues of the presidential form of government.

Nagaland — DILIP KUMAR PHUKAN

LESSER BENEFITS

Your report "Tyres: The Excise Exercise" (September 15) has certain factual inaccuracies. We commenced commercial production only in May 1980 and hence we did not derive any benefit under the excise notifications issued in 1976 and 1978, as indicated by you. Also, the total excise benefit derived by our company is much less than what has been indicated in your article.

Mysore — N.V. SUBRAMANYAM
secretary & general manager, Vikrant Tyres Ltd

The figures on excise benefit were obtained from the Government. —*Editor*

WHEELING DEALING

With reference to your report "Back on the Track" (Trade Winds, August 31), it is wrong to state that rejections on wheel rims supplied to Maruti have been as high as 50 to 80 per cent. We are currently the only supplier of wheel rims to Maruti Udyog. Initially, we did have problems related to transit damage and finished paint peeling off, and the rejection rate was high: 20 to 23 per cent. Since then the rejection rate has come down and the cumulative rejection rate up to June was 8 per cent.

Madras — S. RAM
managing director, Wheels India Ltd

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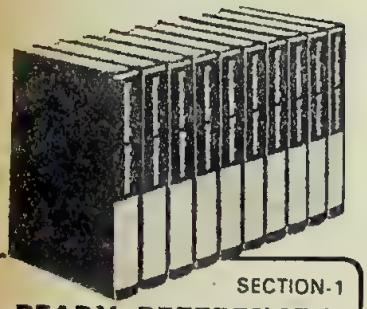
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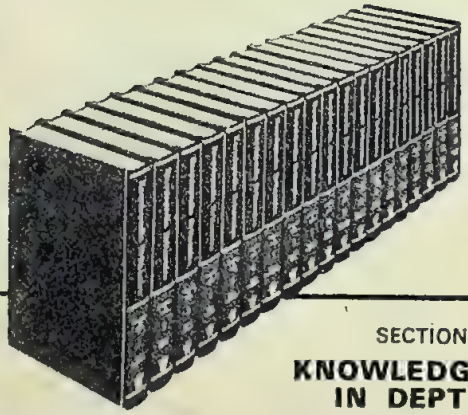


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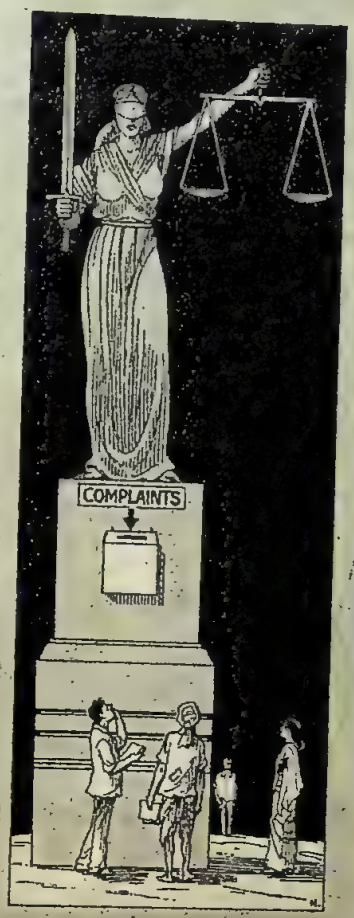
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Justice Blinded

THE SUPREME COURT, the ultimate arbiter in matters of law, is expected to interpret laws to ensure that justice is done, and seen to be done. Yet that is exactly where it has failed in its recent judgement on the question of the status of Assam's electoral rolls. In the process, the law has been shown to indeed be an ass.

The issue is politically a complicated one, but is legally quite simple. The Supreme Court was asked to rule on the validity of the 1983 election in Assam which was challenged because it was based on the 1979 electoral rolls which everybody, including the Election Commission, admits are grossly defective. They admittedly include foreigners and do not include the several lakh young voters who crossed the minimum voting age in the intervening years.



The issue was important because the upcoming Lok Sabha elections are to be held on the basis of the same rolls although the Election Commission is obliged to update the rolls each year. This it has not been able to do, it pleads, because of the special problem in Assam. Arguing that "there is no concept of elections as a whole," the judges said: "In our opinion, the electoral rolls of 1979 cannot be condemned as invalid."

The brunt of the Supreme Court argument is that there is no ground for anyone to challenge an election as a whole. An election can be challenged in any one constituency, and that too in the form of election petitions which can be challenged only on grounds listed under Section 100 of the Representation of People's Act of 1951, which does not include fraudulent or defective electoral rolls. This implies that the only way of ridding the electoral rolls of foreigners is to challenge the inclusion of each and every individual believed to be a foreigner by individual petition. The numbers could run into lakhs. Another snag: electoral rolls can be challenged only before they are finalised, not after an election is held. So the conundrum is complete: the Election Commission will not revise the rolls, the Supreme Court says it cannot rule on the validity of the election that was held based on these defective rolls, and petitioners will have just 15 days time before the next election in which to provide evidence that large numbers of individuals on these rolls are foreigners. Since, presumably, the courts will require evidence of this, Assam is quite clearly in a blind alley.

The implications are horrifying, and a mockery of democracy. Indian legislators are being elected by Bangladeshi citizens and neither the Government nor the courts can do anything about it. Lakhs of young men and women who should vote cannot do so, and neither the Government nor the courts can do anything about it. The democratic process is being undermined from within—and, again, neither the Government nor the courts can do anything about it. A fit case, if ever there was one, to change the law, to postpone the election—to follow any course other than the one being followed at the moment.

Leadership Vacuum

PUNJAB is an open invitation to leadership, but the Akalis and Sikh priests don't seem to be able to take it up. Instead, they are succeeding in merely confirming the portrait that the Centre paints of them: that they don't know their minds, that they are soft on terrorists and they are not responsible leaders. Unfortunately, examples that back up this view are not hard to find. When the militants took over the Akal Takht briefly on October 1, the priests at first condemned them as "mischievous and anti-panth elements who indulged in hooliganism and violated the sanctity of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht." The very next day, apparently out of fear of the militants, they said it was all a Congress(I) plot and two days later some of them demanded the release of the "innocent persons." Similarly, one day President Zail Singh is a *tankhaiya*; another day he is not. Then, one day they admit that Sikhs were tortured and killed inside the Golden Temple during Bhindranwale's reign, another day they decline to issue a religious edict against such killings. Worst of all, there is vacillation on a categorical declaration that promises to preserve the sanctity of Sikh shrines and protect them from armed extremists.

There is more than a touch of urgency to all this. For one, although Bhindranwale is dead, extremist killings continue. Two, though the security forces did well to enter the Akal Takht to evict the militants, such actions if they are repeated will hardly build trust between the Sikhs and the Government. What Punjab needs is a leadership that represents the interest of its people and can earn their trust, both Sikh and Hindu. This will not happen unless the Sikh priests and Akalis take an unambiguous stand on keeping arms and armed men out of the temples and shrines. It won't happen if these leaders don't stop issuing empty threats they are in no position to carry out. It won't happen as long as the Centre, which bears the ultimate responsibility, can point to the lack of decisiveness on the part of the Sikh leadership, and evade its own responsibility to take the next steps in Punjab.

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● *She (Mrs Gandhi) knows the game of politics and she has never claimed to be a saint in politics.* ■ VASANT SATHE in *Weekend Review*

● *Many people are abusing me... The press is abusing me day in and day out ... You all have abused me so much. But I have never bothered.* ■ N. BHASKARA RAO in *Onlooker*

● *What India lacks is teamwork. Mrs Gandhi has not been able to develop a team of equals. She is not the first amongst equals. She is the first and the last.* ■ ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE in *Gentleman*

● *I can do much better than many others. I would not have acted so clumsily as the governor in Andhra Pradesh.* ■ UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT, governor of West Bengal at a press conference

● *In this country there is absolutely no discipline, anywhere—and if you don't have that, you have nothing.* ■ RAJA BHALENDRA SINGH in *Sportsweek*

● *Thanks to the Youth Congress, everybody has the impression that if a man is under 40, he is of necessity an anti-social element because this is the kind of mood created by the Youth Congress.* ■ MENAKA GANDHI in *The Week*

● *It seems that everything is wrong with the men and women who fill our major institutions. Their conscience is dead, their ethical impulses have dried up. No statutory amendments, no procedural refinement, not even systematic change, can awaken their conscience.* ■ MADHU LIMAYE in *Mainstream*

● *Those who suffer from anti-Muslim prejudice will, after having vented their spleen, add the sugary sentence, "mind you, some of my best friends are Muslims".* ■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *The Telegraph*

● *No matter how idealistic you are, you do need a square meal. Just saying good cinema, good cinema may land you with a begging bowl on the streets.* ■ ROHINI HATTANGADY in *The Times of India*

● *I had always thought of myself as a serious, intense actress. I could never see myself in glamour roles. I thought I would be a natural actress. Now I'm told I should act at being natural.* ■ DIMPLE KAPADIA in *Filmfare*

● *Vijay Tendulkar is good for topical subjects. Period. Javed is a good dialogue writer. Nothing more. Gulzar has a school of writing of his own, with no students! I am the best. I blow my own trumpet.* ■ K.K. SHUKLA, screen script-writer in *Cine Blitz*

● *Lataji (Mangeshkar) has always been my inspiration... She is my idol and ideal.* ■ RUNA LAILA in *Eve's Weekly*


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MONEY MANAGEMENT.

By Nusli R. Davar,
Financial Expert, Bombay.

"If you're not a millionaire yet, read on.

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The number of people investing in shares is steadily increasing. Today there are around sixty lakh shareholders in the country. For the young and middle aged, the only avenue where growth of capital is available in India, is the stockmarket. But take care. It's a jungle out there. What with the 'bulls' and the 'bears'... keep your eyes and ears open. Here are some survival tips: never act on hearsay or buy a stock on the basis of a market rumour or because a friend has recommended it to you. Seek the advice of a good portfolio manager on how to deploy your funds profitably. (Normally, the fees of such consultants are quite reasonable and their guidance, worthwhile.) But if you prefer to play the game on your own, first determine your time horizon. Decide how much of your money you intend to invest in shares that will grow over a period of time and how much you intend to trade with. A good investment to trading ratio would be around 70:30.

Take stock of the market situation.

Carefully study the various industries listed on the stock market and make your projections for them. The list-toppers should merit deeper study. Make a shortlist of the best companies within those industries. You may find that the shares of the best companies are fully priced or priced way above their intrinsic value. Look for a new entrant in the industry whose share is priced low but has good potential ahead, whether due to its quality of management, or its future seems rosy due to some product innovation or diversification and modernisation programme.

Next, learn charting or subscribe to a good charting service that will recommend to you shares based on the measurement of supply and demand.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

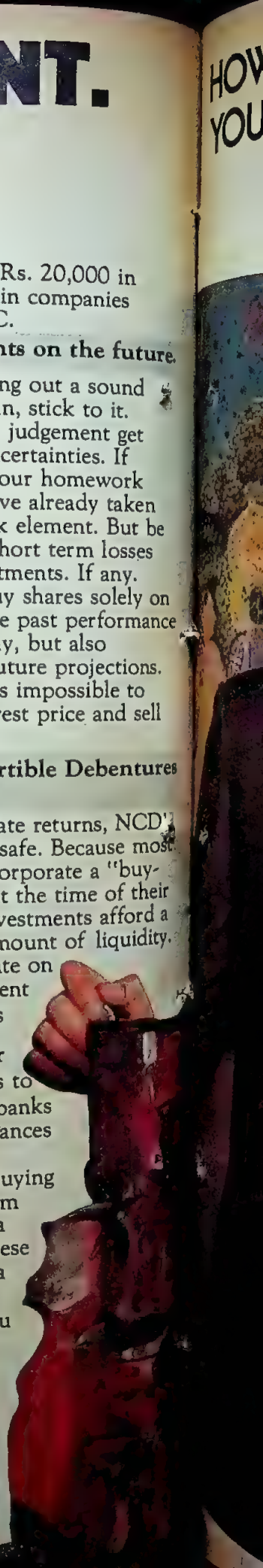
Spread out your investment amongst companies with the best potential, in at least five different industries. You can make a tidy packet by rolling part of your funds in new issues and selling these on allotment. However, retain the shares of good new companies and you can claim a tax write-off of Rs. 10,000 on an investment of Rs. 20,000 in shares of certain companies under S.80 CC.

Set your sights on the future.

After working out a sound investment plan, stick to it. Don't let your judgement get clouded by uncertainties. If you've done your homework carefully, you've already taken care of the risk element. But be prepared for short term losses and disappointments. If any. Also, don't buy shares solely on the basis of the past performance of the company, but also consider the future projections. Remember, it's impossible to buy at the lowest price and sell at the highest.

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FOR GOD'S SAKE



■ There are a lot of gods in India, in all shapes and sizes, of varying strengths and gifts, and one of the most respected and powerful is Lord Jagannath of Puri. He is, of course, the creator of all beings, including the gossamer light butterflies. And it was a butterfly that caused a ruckus in Cuttack the other day.

It was an unwitting cause, because it was dead, and lying near a telephone pole. That was where a passerby noticed it and let out a howl of delight, for he had seen two large eyes on its wings. The eyes were exactly like those of Lord Jagannath and that was enough for the passerby and hundreds of others who spread the message, that the lord had been incarnated. In less time than it takes to say 'Praise be the lord' a huge crowd gathered on the spot.

They included several groups of itinerant singers who, while singing the lord's praises were also managing to hold up most of Cuttack's traffic. People who landed up with offerings added their mite. Things only became manageable when a policeman carried the butterfly to a nearby temple and the sound of the kirtans faded into the distance.

SPEED FREAK

■ Looking at the state of public transport in India, nobody would think it possible for the rickety old buses to outpace more than a few moth-eaten horses. One bus driver in Calcutta was, however, throwing his chariot all over the place at a speed which was making his passengers green in the face. The idea was to overtake another bus which was also clattering along in the Roaring Eighties.



For anybody who has been in a large bus bouncing along on pot-holes the experience can be frightening, but the passengers were too busy clinging to the nearest support to tell the driver that —until the bus halted at Salt Lake. Then they got down from the bus and squatted in front of the vehicle in a group. They said their piece in Bengali, a language particularly well suited to flights of impassioned oratory, their message being: "Hell, no, we won't go!"

When they got back into the bus after 20 minutes of conversation the driver appeared to have cooled down and didn't work the accelerator with his earlier enthusiasm. One reason was the dharna; another was the fact that the bus he had been racing had disappeared long ago in a cloud of dust.

BITTER HALF

■ Any husband who returns home from a hard day at the office and discovers a wife with a face that looks like a swollen potato is in for trouble. And when a chap in Ujjain came back home to find his better half looking like a bitter half he looked around for a suit of armour, found none, and told her to go ahead and shoot.



She showed him a letter. It said that he was confirming the date of the engagement and at the appointed time he would turn up to tie the first knot in a long and happy relationship. As is understandable, this did not go down very well with the wife who asked—although she did not quite phrase it that way —what this was all about.

A half-hour of this—the technique apparently is to alternate anger and tears —and the husband was a nervous wreck. Between assuring his wife that he wasn't going to take another one, and trying to push away their four-month baby which she insisted on parading before him, it was all he could do to pick up the letter and read the date, which turned out to be one 15 months old. The letter was, in fact, the one he himself had written but it had clearly dawdled on the way from Mandsaur, inadvertently setting off a family crisis.

SNAKE PIT

■ Everything in India revolves around files, or rather, files revolve around everything and everybody and nobody seems to have asked why India should be subjected to this kind of roller coaster ride. Nobody human, that is, because, as it turns out, a snake is investigating this bewildering state of affairs.

Last fortnight, it found itself sniffing around in the maze of cardboard and paper in the records room of the Supreme Court of India. Record rooms are much the same everywhere and after a good hour of research it slithered out. Unfortunately, it was noticed by a number of human beings who immediately climbed onto tables and chairs and shouted "Snake!"



This brought along a few hundred more men and two snake charmers who pulled out their *beens* and warbled away to glory, trying to entice the investigative reporter into revealing itself. This, very prudently, it refused to do, preferring to vanish into the papery maze where it continued its researches even as the humans stayed on their tables and chairs and pondered: what next?

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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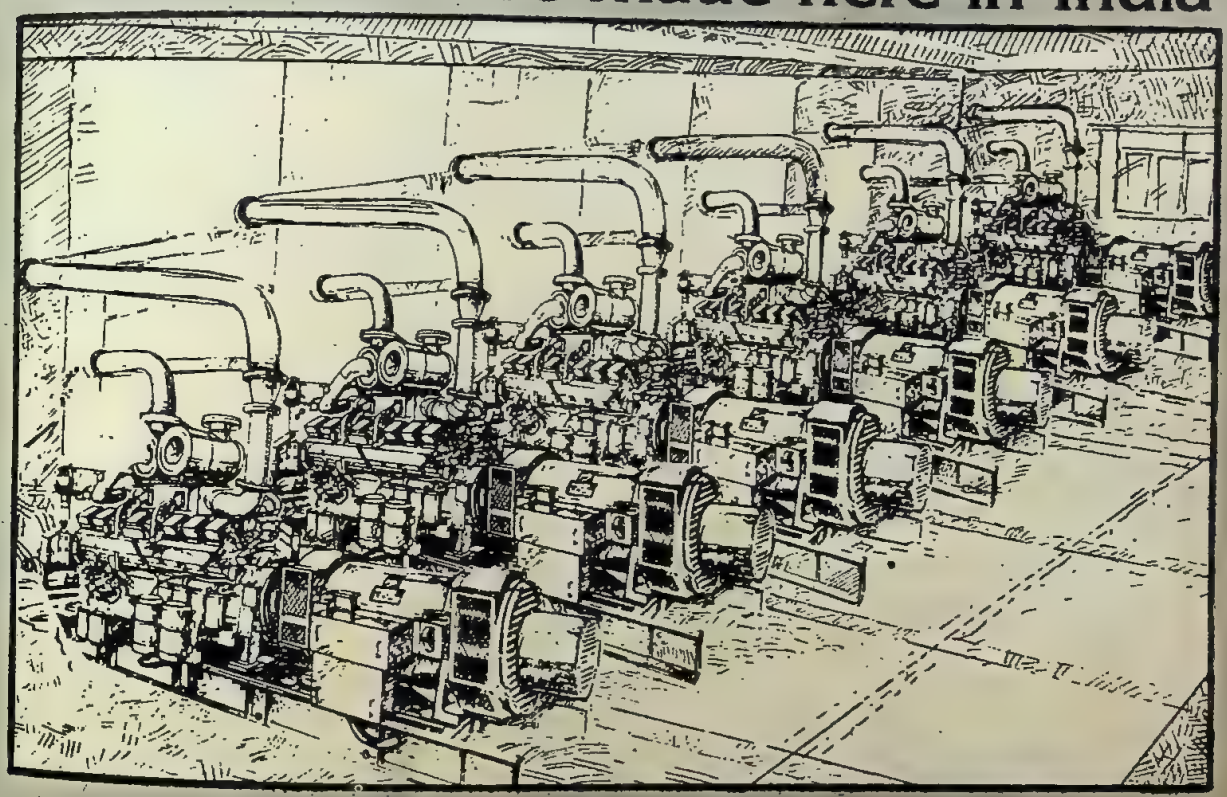
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PUNJAB

Tardy Progress

SWADESH TALWAR/Indian Express



Khalistan flag being raised at the Golden Temple by militants

THE ARMY withdrawal from the Golden Temple last fortnight after a four-month occupation seemed like the much-awaited first positive step towards peace and normalcy in Punjab. But typically, even the handing over of the holiest of Sikh shrines was not free from wrangling and controversy. Though the earlier troop pull-out from the Harmandir Sahib and the newly-restored Akal Takht was smooth enough, the handing over of the other four buildings in the temple complex proved to be a prickly problem. It took long and arduous and sometimes acrimonious negotiations between the Government, the Sikh high priests and the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) to resolve the issue. But the result seemed to satisfy both the Government and the Sikh leadership. "We have got back our complex and the army is finally out," beamed Bhan Singh, SGPC secretary.

The SGPC will have to see to the restoration of the other buildings in the complex —the Guru Nanak Nivas, where the infamous Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale held court; the SGPC headquarters, Teja Singh Samundari Hall; the Guru Ram Das Serai and the langar building—the subject of so much debate last fortnight. But the SGPC began its new phase of control over its traditional domain on a piquant note. The police made a sensational discovery in the SGPC headquarters—contraband, including Rs 15,400 in Pakistani currency, 69 cartridges for .57 mm rifles and 5 kg of gold, was found in a chest. Bhan Singh's tame explanation that the currency was obsolete and the SGPC had actually resolved in 1970 to destroy it didn't convince many. "We shall certainly prosecute them after investigation," said a grim Ramesh Inder Singh, Amritsar's deputy police commissioner. The discovery has fuelled speculation about what more will be found when the police open up the other 90 lockers in the Serai in the coming days.

If there was a delay in handing over the temple completely to the SGPC, it was for purely tactical reasons. Union Parliamentary Minister Buta Singh, who had been declared *tankhaiya* by the head priests for his association with the Government-sponsored Sarbat Khalsa, had to be somehow exonerated. The Government tried to use the handing over of the temple as a lever in bargaining with the priests, but to no avail. "Buta Singh will have to present himself at the Akal Takht and receive punishment," declared Jathedar Kirpal Singh, chief of the Akal Takht. But in their meetings with Government officials, the priests promised to let off the minister with a minor punishment—reciting the Akhand Path at home, or some small *seva* (voluntary work) at the temple. This is a concession to the Sikh minister who can hardly hope to do well in his predominantly Sikh constituency of Ropar in Punjab in the coming general elections without making his peace with the priests.

The Government also sought to have the excommunicated Nihang chief, Baba Santa Singh, exonerated. But on this point, the priests were very firm: the extreme order on the stocky Nihang chief could by no means be revoked. The priests were already facing drastic threats for having exonerated President Zail Singh last month. Though they responded more positively to Buta Singh's emissaries, Surjit Singh Majithia, former Union minister in Nehru's cabinet, and Patna Sahib Takht Committee chief Joginder Singh Jogi, the priests drew the line at any possibility of a pardon for Santa Singh.

The Government also failed in its efforts to wrest more concessions from the

priests. The priests gave no written or verbal guarantee that the places of worship would not once more turn into a refuge for terrorists. Instead, they declared defiantly: "We are aware that Sikhs are being implicated in false cases and killed in fake encounters. We understand the plight of those whose families have been killed by the army, and also the families of army deserters will have to be taken care of." Mrs Gandhi's efforts to coax the priests into issuing a religious edict ordering Sikhs to eschew violence, and declare a social boycott of the terrorists proved equally futile. "We agree to nothing of this sort," said Kirpal Singh. "It is the Government's business to handle law and order outside the temple complex. If the Government itself is indulging in the killing of innocents, how can it avoid retaliation?"

SUCH categorical declarations obviously do not augur well. Pessimists point to the row during the thanksgiving ceremony at the Golden Temple on October 1, as a sign that it is too soon for hope. On that day, 300 Sikh youth overran the stage, and for two hours, shouted pro-Bhindranwale and Khalistan slogans, and even hoisted a "Khalistan flag" atop the golden dome. The tumultous reception they received from the assembled crowd caused panic among the priests and SGPC officials who immediately phoned for the police. Yet later, under pressure from Sikh militants, the priests denied making the call and instead alleged that it was Congress(I) agents who were responsible. "We know for sure that Buta Singh and others have sent men to instigate trouble and bring a bad name to the Sikhs," said Kirpal Singh. SGPC leaders say this is why so many of those arrested were released. The police said only a dozen were released when they were found to be innocent. But within 10 days, another 120 were freed without interrogation.

The fortnight also showed that even if the Government got the Sikh leadership to accept the restored Akal Takht, they lost ground on other fronts. Random acts of terrorism continued; apart from the eight Hindu bus passengers who were killed near Gurdaspur, there was an attack on a Ram Lila congregation in which two were killed and 13 injured. On Dussehra day, bombs were hurled outside the Hall Gate in Amritsar. At intervals of two days, there were attacks on Sursingh, a big village near Amritsar, as well as in the town of Phagwara.

The Government issued threats that seemed futile, if not phoney — "terrorism shall not be allowed to raise its ugly head".

LEADERSHIP

Power Play

A NEW power centre has emerged in Punjab—in the unlikeliest of places. With Bhindranwale eliminated and the important Akali leaders in jail, it is the five high priests of the Sikhs who have come to occupy centre-stage in the Punjab drama.

Their emergence breaks with a six-decade history of the Akali movement during which the priests kept away from politics, confining themselves to religious affairs. Only the jathedar of the Akal Takht, the highest temporal and religious seat of the Sikhs, played any significant part in politics, but that only when he declared one or other of the Akalis to be *tankhaiya*—someone guilty of religious misconduct.

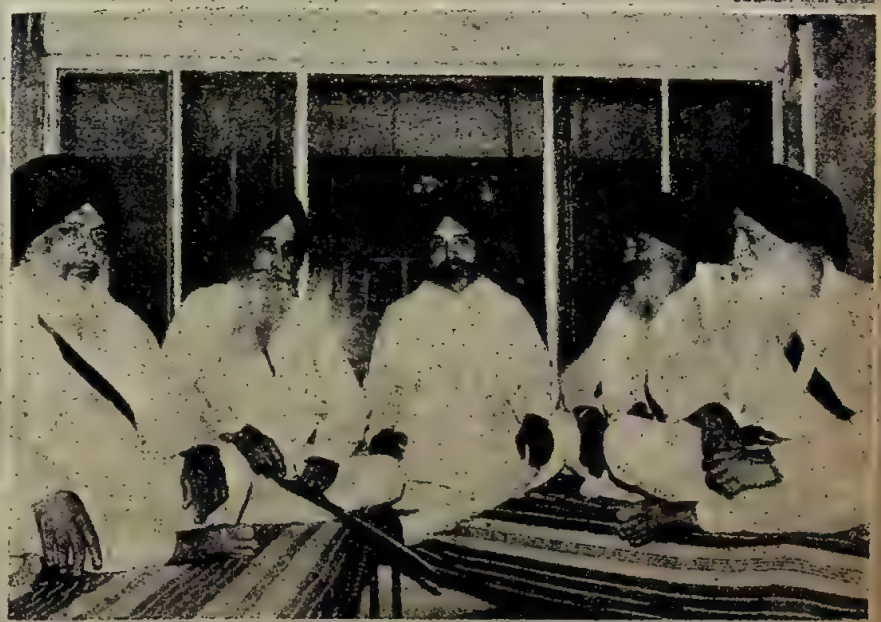
All that has now changed. Jathedar Kirpal Singh of the Akal Takht, Sahib Singh of the Golden Temple, Pritam Singh, head priest of the Akal Takht, Jathedar Harcharan Singh Mahalon of the Takht Keshgarh Sahib of Anandpur and Jathedar Lakha Singh of the Dam-Dama Takht in Bhatinda have been embroiled in negotiations with the emissaries of the Centre and state. Kirpal Singh and Sahib Singh were handy soon after Operation Bluestar when they declared on radio and television that the Golden Temple had not suffered much damage. They were obliged to retract within a month when the militants came down heavily against them.

Their next public act was the World Sikh Convention (INDIA TODAY September 30,) which boosted their image as did President Zail Singh's well-publicised meetings with them last month. Mrs Indira Gandhi too has found the priests—some of them—convenient to talk to and spite the Akalis with. Their crowning moment came when the Golden Temple was handed to them and not to the Akalis or the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) which actually runs the shrines.

But the spotlight has also turned on the differences that exist among Sikhs. Their exoneration of the President has been described as being against Sikh tradition, and they have been threatened with dire consequences if they repeat it. Also, two other priests, the jathedars of the gurudwaras at Patna and Nanded have been kept out of the quintet although Sikh tradition says that it is the jathedars of the takhts and not the high priests who are supreme. Moreover, Kirpal Singh and Mahalon have taken opposing positions on certain issues: when Mahalon offered prayers on October 5 for all those killed in Punjab in the last three years, Kirpal Singh rebuked him publicly.

The authority of the high priests has not gone without challenge, as the incident of October 1 indicated and the militants called them "parasites". And such challenge is likely to grow in the weeks ahead.

SUBASH KRIPEKAR



The five high priests of the Golden Temple: centre-stage

Apparently undaunted by the army's continued presence in the state, the terrorists resumed indiscriminate killing—some put the number of those killed after the army operations at a stupendous 400. And this was despite the police "encounters" with terrorists in which 28 people were killed in three months.

On the political level, things threaten to slump into a quiet impasse. Mrs Gandhi and her advisers, whose steadfast aim appears to be to divide the Akalis, have been debating whether to bring back a popular government or let President's Rule continue. Hordes of state Congress(I) MLA's have been lobbying in Delhi for the return of a popularly-elected government—but there is no unanimity on who will lead it. Those in the party who have no chance of sharing power oppose the move entirely. A disillusioned Mohinder Singh Gill, former state Congress(I) president, says: "Our ministers will cut at our own roots during the coming Lok Sabha elections. Groupism in the party has taken on menacing proportions." And a divided Congress(I) is hardly in a position to take on the Akalis.

The dithering Akalis, for their part, have neither managed to unite and force issues on Mrs Gandhi, nor shown the courage to oppose terrorism. "Despite such a beating by Mrs Gandhi, we have failed to learn any lesson," says an angry Akali MP, Dr Rajinder Kaur. "If we were united, she would not have dared to attack the Golden Temple." There are those in the party who agree with her. When the Akali leadership met in Amritsar late last fortnight to take stock of the situation, for almost three hours, there was just a factional venting of spleen. Some accused Majithia of being Mrs Gandhi's agent. In turn, Majithia's supporters accused SGPC Chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra of being in league with the Congress(I). The Akalis, as a matter of fact, have not mustered enough courage and unity to demand the release of their leaders Tohra and Harchand Singh Longowal.

With the general elections just around the corner, Mrs Gandhi may find it expedient not to opt for a political solution to the vexed problem of Punjab. At any rate, not unless it brings in its wake some tangible political advantage. Obviously, a settlement that seems to favour the Akalis even a little bit will cost her her popularity in neighbouring Haryana and in the rest of the country as well. The Akalis can similarly be expected to get tough in negotiations. If this happens, the handing over of the temple notwithstanding, Punjab will probably remain in a crisis situation.

—GOBIND THUKRAL, in Amritsar

GURDASPUR

Amity Endures

FOUR months after Operation Bluestar, the security forces have withdrawn from the Golden Temple. But in the countryside, the armed presence continues, and often leads to abrasive encounters with the villagers. The forces have a difficult task, to flush out terrorists, and their methods sometimes result in alienating the villagers from the authorities. In the wake of incidents last month, SUDIP MAZUMDAR, *visited Gurdaspur district and neighbouring areas of Punjab to assess the mood in the countryside. His report:*

THAT CHILLY night few people in Mand village could sleep. Men huddled together behind closed doors, women stared blankly and sobbed, only the children slept—hungry. Only a few hours earlier, on September 23, the villagers of Mand had found themselves surrounded by a phalanx of carbine-toting paramilitary and police forces. As the uniformed men closed in on their target, wading through waist-high paddy crop, firing from their weapons, Naseeb Singh's blood ran cold. The 60-year-old former steel worker had never seen such a sight as three bodies, holed by bullets, fell to the ground near a tubewell. One of them was his brother, Pyara Singh, a terrorist in the eyes of the Government.

As guns stopped crackling, the intruding uniformed men appeared at doorsteps. They rifled through some houses and finally left the village taking seven men with them: four alive and three dead. Among the four were Naseeb's uncle, Dewan Singh, aged 80, nephew Amrik Singh, only 15. The men had been classified as terrorists; but to Naseeb and his large family, they were innocent, and a great help on the farm.

Mand is still in a state of shock after the shoot-out. On a gloomy afternoon, men and women sat in the courtyard remembering the dead and praying for the return of the living. But Naseeb is not sure. He does not know where his old uncle and young nephew are being held captive, whether or not he will see them again, what tortures are being inflicted on them. "Could you please find out where they are," pleads his aged father, tears rolling down his weather-beaten, furrowed face. At the tubewell where his brother was shot dead, Naseeb caresses the abundant, golden crop standing in the field and murmurs: "It's ready, but I have no heart to harvest it."

Back at his home, he invites his guests to have a meal, a glass of milk, anything. How can a guest return without eating something? The tension and brutality through which Mand has lived hasn't snatched away its innate sense of hospitality. Nor has it disrupted the basic communal harmony that continues there. The incident of September 23 has thrown the lives of the 1,200-odd families in the village out of gear, but it has left untouched the bonds that tie—and protect—the 20-odd Hindu families in the village with their Sikh neighbours. The village has experienced the might of the state but the Sikhs of Mand do not see their age-old



Naseeb Singh at the tubewell where his brother and two others were shot dead

Hindu neighbours as enemies. Says a young man sitting in Naseeb's courtyard: "We have told our Hindu brothers, not to worry. We will not let anyone touch them."

Here, then, is the key to the maturity of the large majority of the 17 million people of Punjab, worn thin here and there, but on the whole intact even as the state has been shaken by waves of violence and strife over three years. If Mand is typical—and located in Gurdaspur district it is in the middle of the most disturbed area—then despite the calculated meddling of the Centre and state governments, the hypocritical religious leadership, the fanatic bands of terrorists and the unrelenting harshness of the security forces, Punjab still lives, its people by and large valiantly resisting these forces threatening to tear its society apart.

The dangers are still there, of course.

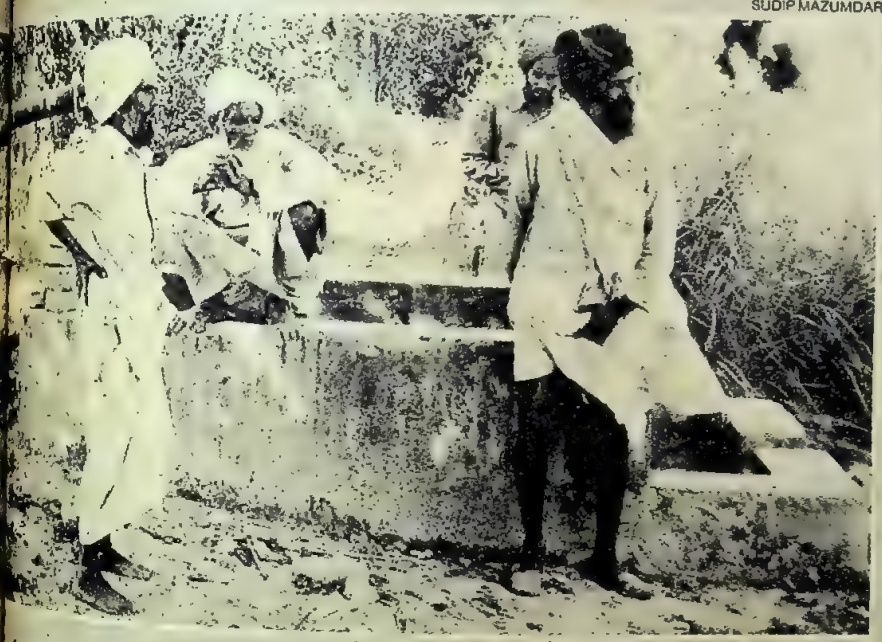
In the absence of a forward-looking, secular leadership in Punjab, the militants often find it easy to misuse the dejection of large Sikh masses. That is why in the political vacuum created by a prolonged military and paramilitary presence, the militants could raise emotive slogans and storm the Akal Takht as many faithful Sikhs looked on helplessly. The distrust, the venality and the violence practised by the main actors in Punjab's sordid drama have not been able to pollute the minds of its industrious rural folk. Why else would Naseeb and people like him wonder: "When will this mayhem going to end?"

But their patience is being put through a hard test. Naseeb had to lose his brother not because he was a terrorist but because he was suspected of harbouring two suspected terrorists, Mangal Singh and Gurnam Singh, both slain near the tubewell. The Government says that both of them, riding a scooter, shot and killed a clerk of the Punjab Canal Works in Atwal village, three kilometers from Mand, on September 22. At Atwal, the Government's story finds few believers. Nor are the paramilitary jawans who took part in the Mand action sure of their victims: "We were called in by the police and we went to help them," said one.

Down the road from Mand towards Batala is Chowk Mehta. Gurudwara Gurdarshan Prakash where Bhindranwale unleashed violence before he found sanctuary in the Golden Temple, is deserted. Troops patrol outside. Beyond the iron gate are a few sevadars and an old granthi who mumbles: "Nobody dares to come here and pray." But there is no trace of bitterness. In the village nearby, sarpanch Sant Singh, is apprehensive to talk at first. His village has borne the brunt of the combined combing operations and interrogations by the army and the paramilitary force. Villagers say that able-bodied men have been tortured. Here too, the Hindu fragment is safe. Says one priest: "Before anyone can harm them, they will have to reckon with us."

Beyond Chowk Mehta lies Batala, a trading centre, where on September 12, a bus was hijacked by fanatics and eight Hindus were shot dead in a nearby field. At a tea-stall next to the bus stand, two Sikh employees of the state road transport corporation are sipping tea. Sikh-Hindu enmity? "I don't know anything about that, but I can tell you I have been working at this bus stand for the past 15 years, and every day I have tea at the pundit's shop. You know, he makes very good tea," says one of them.

SUDIP MAZUMDAR



But Hindu insecurity is also manifest. Vijay Bhandari, an employee of the electricity board in Batala points out the spot where the innocent bus passengers were slain. "You know, there is only one way out for us, we Hindus should unite and challenge the Sikhs." What this can mean was evident at Fatehgarh Churian, a small town not far from the Pakistan border, on the way back to Amritsar. The streets are deserted in the early night and a paramilitary picket stops the car and the jawans want to search it. "There was a grenade attack in the town two weeks ago," explains one young man, "and the Hindus have mobilised themselves into civil defence units to protect their lives and property."

The Hindu youths materialise on rooftops, in alleyways. The men have vermillion streaks dabbed on their foreheads, and carry spears, machetes, swords and even guns. The mood is an angry one, and the vigilantes thump the car and bang on the windows as it drives away.

Back at Amritsar, it is the day after the army is withdrawn from the temple. The authorities have been rounding up people all night to ensure peace the next day. An old man walking with his grandson is among them. Two journalist colleagues are detained in a congested lock-up. The moves are unable to protect the Akal Takht from the 200-odd militants who seized control of it briefly.

Who are these militants who have terrorised Punjab for so long? Since Operation Bluestar, 68 men have been rounded up in Gurdaspur district and charged with terrorism. Police chief A. P. Pandey says that most of the arrested are between 18 and 30 years of age and are either unemployed or drop-outs. Their interrogation, he says, shows them to be emotionally charged people who act impulsively.

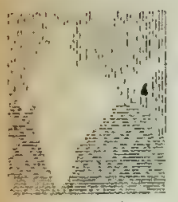
Since June, they and another 30 men who are still at large have struck in about 40 separate incidents and killed 26 people, the highest toll in any Punjab district. As a result, the countryside is uneasy and apprehensive, but the cult of violence has mercifully not been able to win support from the larger Sikh masses, or else the state would have exploded in a frenzy of violence between Sikhs and Hindus.

That is why, despite the turmoil and continuing strife, a bumper harvest of paddy and cotton is expected this year. A record paddy production of 70 lakh tonnes and a cotton output of 10 lakh bales is almost ready. In the countryside, Sikhs and Hindus contribute to each other's well-being. "It is this yearning for peace and harmony that we should nurture. Only then can we isolate the terrorists and render them ineffective," says a senior official.

Sadly, the pressures operate mostly in the opposite direction. In the fluid state of Punjab politics, reason and rationality have become casualties and all the main actors in the drama have shown little more than a greed for power. Today, the baser instincts are being pampered, assigning sanity a back-seat. Yet, in this terrifying and complex scenario, large numbers of people have not fallen prey either to terrorists' tirades or politicians' stay-in-power games. Their anguished cry wants peace and an end to repression. The moot point is how long they will be able to hold out, how long the Naseeb Singhs of Punjab will keep their heads.

MIZORAM

Conciliatory Moves



THE IMMINENT visit of Laldenga, the self-exiled president of the Mizo National Front (MNF), again signals hope, however slender, for the troubled Union territory of Mizoram. For the Britain-based Mizo leader, it will be his third journey to India in recent years to attempt to settle the almost two-decade old problem. But hopes are high that these talks will yield more than ever before. Though North Block sources refuse to discuss or offer any speculation on the agenda, Laldenga and the Government are generally expected to cover some traditionally sensitive ground—statehood for Mizoram, and the political rehabilitation "with honour" of Laldenga, his senior colleagues and the 300 hard core Mizo rebels now hiding across the border in the Chittagong hill tracts.

Not everyone is sure the talks will lead to any significant gains. Such scepticism is understandable, because Laldenga has proved to be quite a tricky customer before. For instance, he did not honour an agreement he signed in July 1976; and later in 1982 he disrupted a second round of talks by making impossible demands. In fact there is a lobby in the Home Ministry that is quite unhappy about the importance being given to the visit, because they believe the 57-year-old Laldenga is a spent force, and that his writ is no longer law for the hard core MNF rebels who have been fighting a bloody battle for a Mizo nation since 1966.

The second round of talks failed because Laldenga wanted statehood for Mizoram (population: 5 lakh; area: 21,081 sq km) with a Jammu & Kashmir-type constitution. He had also demanded the removal of Brigadier T. Sailo, the then democratically elected chief minister of the Union territory. The Centre was willing to consider statehood, but it refused to remove Sailo and install Laldenga.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sailo: out of the way

But the situation is drastically different now. Sailo, the thorn in Laldenga's flesh, is out of the way. He was voted out and the Congress(I) swept to power in the assembly elections in April this year. Even more heart-warming for Laldenga is the fact

LALDENGA

"The peace effort is in my hands"

LALDENGA, the president of the banned Mizo National Front (MNF), is packing his bags to conclude his second self-exile in Britain. He has been living at Woking in Surrey, 75 km from London, since April 1982 when he left India following the failure of his talks with the Indian Government for a political settlement in Mizoram. With him is his wife Diki. Their son Alan, 23, and daughter Debbie, 21, are working there. The 57-year-old Mizo leader has been waging a futile struggle against the Government for over two decades. Apparently tired and fed up, he is now ready to make peace with New Delhi and return to Mizoram for good. Last fortnight, Senior Editor S. VENKAT NARAYAN interviewed him on the telephone. Excerpts:

Q. When are you coming to Delhi for the talks?

A. I am still waiting to hear from the Home Ministry. The moment I hear from them, I am ready to go. Two colleagues from the MNF headquarters will join me too.

Q. Have the instructions for the unilateral cease-fire gone to the MNF headquarters?

A. Yes, I sent the instructions on October 2, Gandhiji's birthday, as a gesture of goodwill.

Q. What has been the reaction?

A. I haven't heard from them as yet. It takes time. But I know my boys; I am sure they will accept it.

Q. What about hard core MNF leaders, like Zoramthanga, Tawnluia and Lalrinmawia who are now in the Chittagong hill tracts?

A. They too will definitely accept it. They are my faithful friends. The entire peace effort is in my hands. They came here to talk to me and they will agree to what I say.

Q. What about the rehabilitation of the rebels?

A. This is something to be discussed with the Government. I have asked my senior colleagues to specify what they want. As for the MNF rank and file, they will all lay down arms. We will settle them inside India. Some of them may like to join the Indian army or the police while some others may prefer to settle down to a quiet life.

Q. There have been charges of MNF involvement in insurgency movements in Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Assam.

A. These movements are intercompementary. When I order the cease-fire, I expect the MNF involvement to come



P. DEV KUMAR



Lalthanhawla: accommodating stand

that Lalthanhawla, his former associate in the MNF, is now the chief minister.

The first thing Lalthanhawla did after being sworn in was to announce that he is ready to make "any sacrifice" to politically rehabilitate Laldenga in order to bring lasting peace to the strife-torn area. The Congress(I) has always been sympathetic to the MNF. Laldenga's elder son David, 29, in fact actively campaigned for the Congress(I) in the assembly elections. Besides, the Mizo patriarch's tape-recorded pro-Congress(I) speech was widely used by the party during the election.

Indeed, it was during the election campaign in Mizoram that Mrs Gandhi had declared that she was ready to resume talks with Laldenga if the MNF gave up arms, agreed to a solution within the constitutional framework and if the initiative came from him. Soon after the election, church leaders and other well-wishers promptly took up Mrs Gandhi's offer with the Mizo leader. He first wrote to her on July 24, accepting her terms. He has since exchanged letters with Home Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, as well.

Coming barely two months before the general election, the talks assume added significance. The atmosphere appears to be ripe for the talks' success. Even though Laldenga is non-committal on the subject, it is entirely possible that he may join the Congress(I) and take over from Lalthanhawla as chief minister, bringing to a happy end his two-decade-old struggle (*see interview*). He is also expected, naturally, to ask for an honourable deal for the rebels by asking the Government to arrange to absorb at least some of them in the army or in the police.

It is widely known that the MNF rebels, enjoying refuge in the bordering Chittagong hill tracts with Dhaka's tacit connivance, have been actively promoting trouble in at least four critical north-eastern states. Intelligence sources say they are backing the Tripura National Volunteers, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the People's Liberation Army in Manipur, and the extremist groups in Assam. By making peace with Laldenga, New Delhi is clearly hoping that it would subsequently be able to to neutralise these trouble-makers too. Laldenga told INDIA TODAY that the unilateral cease-fire he has just ordered would mean the eventual disbanding of the MNF, which in turn would weaken the secessionist movements in the four states.

Peace may yet return to a part of the North-east at last and, in the bargain, the Congress(I) may improve its performance in the region in the coming parliamentary election.

—S. VENKAT NARAYAN

to an end automatically.

Q. The Tripura Chief Minister, Nripen Chakravarti, wants to be involved in the peace talks with you because the MNF is making trouble in his state by helping the Tripura National Volunteers.

A. The peace initiative is with the Central Government. My problem is with the Union Government. I am not involved in any talks with the states. If Tripura or any other state has a problem, it is for them to take it up with the Central Government, not with me.

Q. When you come to Delhi, who will you deal with?

A. Since my party has been banned, I have asked the Indian Government for my safe conduct when I come to India. The prime minister has invited me for the talks. Naturally, I will report to her first. I have been in touch with the home minister too.

Q. How long do you expect the talks to go on?

A. I expect the talks to conclude at one go. I do not expect any complications. I am planning to return to India for good this time.

Q. What exactly do you want now?

A. I want Mizoram upgraded to statehood with a certain amount of autonomy, somewhat in line with what obtains in Jammu and Kashmir.

Q. What kind of role do you see for yourself in Mizoram politics after your return?

A. I am a politician from India and I'll do what I can for the country's integrity and solidarity. I will do nothing to disturb India's power balance.

Q. Mizoram Chief Minister Lalthanhawla says he is ready to make any sacrifice to politically rehabilitate you and to bring peace to the Union territory. Do you think he will resign to make room for you?

A. I don't know. We have not discussed anything so far.

Q. Will you join the Congress(I) in order to become the chief minister?

A. I have not thought about it. It is premature to talk about it anyway.

Q. What will you do if Mrs Gandhi invites you to join her party?

A. Well, she hasn't asked me so far, has she? It is a hypothetical question.

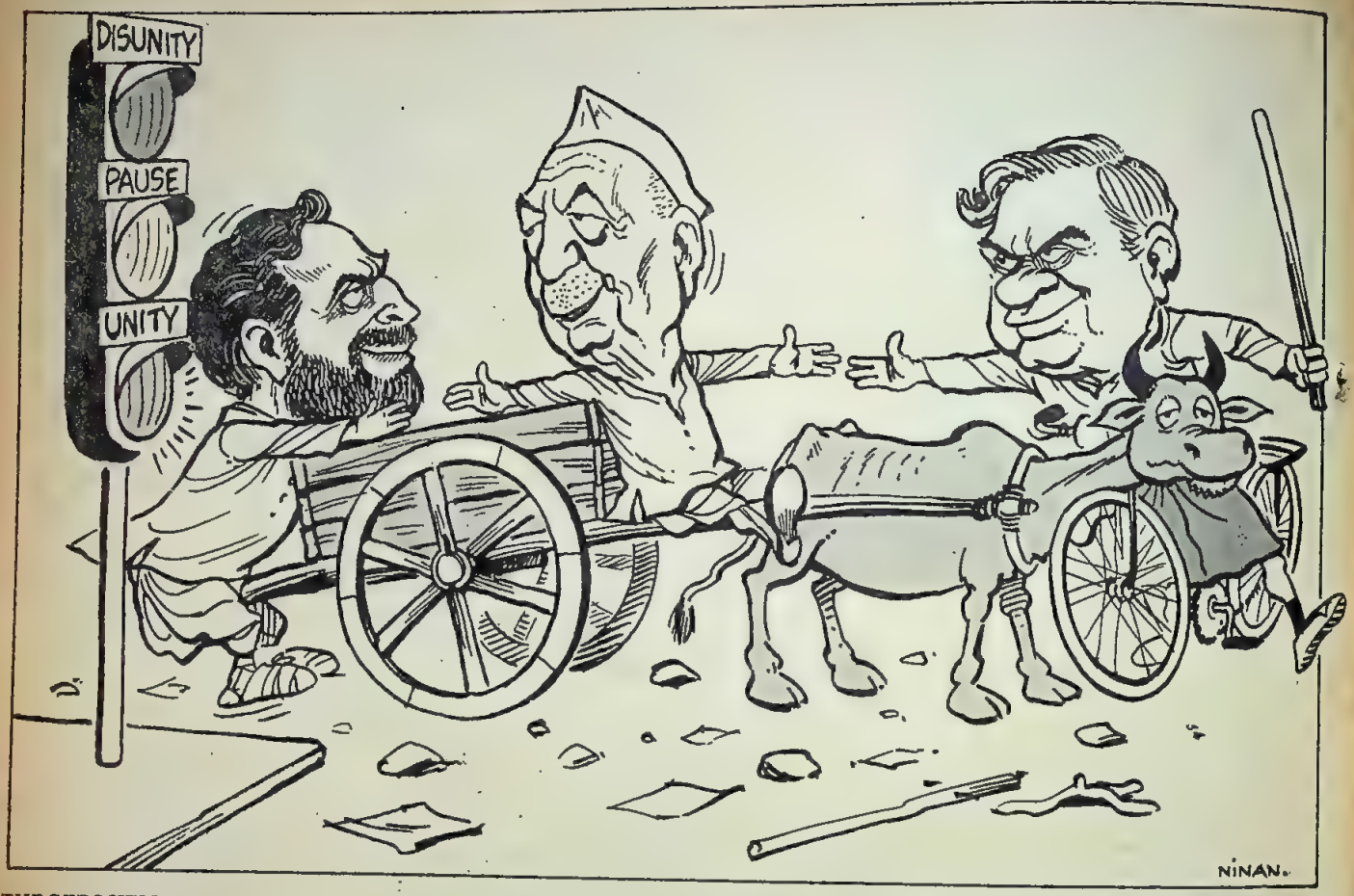
Q. Former Mizoram chief minister Brigadier Sailo has said that a state should be formed, comprising Mizo-inhabited areas in Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and the North Cachar Hills. Will you make a similar demand?

A. Article 3 of the Constitution is clear on this. The Union Government alone cannot do this. We would certainly want this unification, but it has to come later. We won't take this up during the forthcoming talks.

Laldenga: hopeful of settlement

BHAWAN SINGH





THE OPPOSITION

Inching Forward

IS THE Opposition finally getting its act together? The answer seems to be a very tentative maybe. A month ago, at the height of the dramatics in Andhra Pradesh, there were definite signs that the long-awaited breakthrough in the five-year-old stalemate would be achieved. Since then, on the surface at least, the inherent contradictions and personality pulls have once again come to the fore. By last week, however, the hopeful sign was once again blinking on and off as moves for a merger between the Janata Party and the Lok Dal laid the ground for the decision to put up a common opposition candidate for a majority of the Lok Sabha seats in the fast-approaching poll.

The Janata Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced crucial meetings of their national councils in Pune and Delhi in mid-October to thrash out their pre-poll strategy. The BJP, which is a partner in Charan Singh's Lok Dal in the National Democratic Alliance, was also coming under increasing pressure to review the alliance, but both Atal Behari Vajpayee, party chief, and L.K. Advani, party strategist, appeared averse to any move that would upset their moves for seat adjustments.

In the welter of moves and countermoves, it was also clear that Mrs Gandhi continues to cast a long shadow over the unity moves. When the crucial merger talks between the Janata Party and the Lok Dal started and it appeared that Charan Singh's obdurate attitude would once again reverse the unity process, Janata leaders privately expressed fears that he was being wooed and misguided by Mrs Gandhi's emissaries.

But the one hopeful sign in the agonising unity process is that Charan Singh has clarified that he does not want the issue of prime ministership, in the event of an opposition victory, to be settled till after the elections. The key figure to have brought about that change of heart is Biju Patnaik who has been the most active in the behind-the-scene negotiations to effect an understanding between Chandra Shekhar and Charan Singh. Patnaik is believed to have convinced Charan Singh that Chandra Shekhar's remark that anyone would be foolish to think about the prime ministership at this stage, was not directed against him personally, but applied to all opposition leaders. Says Sharad Yadav, Lok Dal general secretary: "The issue was never raised in the merger talks because everyone is convinced that it should be kept aside till after the elections." Added Patnaik: "We want to project a collective leadership before the electorate and not just any individuals."

Though at the moment that is still an elusive eventuality, the prospect of a Lok Dal-Janata Party alliance on the question of seats could spell trouble for the ruling party. Party insiders say that there will be no major problem with regard to an agreement on distribution of seats in Orissa, Karnataka, Bihar and Haryana, a combined total of 113 Lok Sabha seats. The BJP, in the event of pre-poll alliance, expects no obstacles in being allowed to play a dominant role in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh which to-

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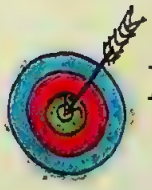
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BHAWAN SINGH



Vajpayee, Charan Singh and other opposition leaders: coming together

gether account for a further 76 seats.

But the crux of the problem will obviously be Uttar Pradesh and the 85 seats that it represents. So far, there has been no decision on what agreement the alliance will come to on Uttar Pradesh but opposition leaders privately agree that the number of disputed seats, including those in Uttar Pradesh will be not more than 200 out of the 542 seats to be contested. They are confident that if they can give the Congress(I) a run for its money in 300 seats, it will be enough to upset the political applecart. Opposition leaders are also bolstered by the results of by-elections held after 1980. Of the 24 Lok Sabha by-elections contested, the Congress(I) has won 14 but in the process it however managed to to lose out in its traditional strongholds like Sagar and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh and Bettiah in Bihar.

There are obviously other factors that could neutralise opposition optimism, the main one being the role of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), considered to be the mainstay of the BJP. The RSS seems to have split after the storming of the Golden Temple and certain elements in the organisation have gone to the extent of supporting the Government action in an obvious bid to retain Hindu backing. The recent statement by RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras that the organisation would support the Hindus suggests that the RSS may decide to back only Hindu candidates irrespective of party affiliations. Even in the 1980 elections, RSS support for the BJP was significantly less than in 1977. But the RSS element still wields considerable influence as was evidenced by the reinstatement of former Madhya Pradesh chief minister V.K. Saklecha after he was suspended, widely believed to be under pressure from the RSS faction in the party. The RSS is also strongly against the BJP merging with any other opposition party.

Faced with that particular problem, it appears that the Lok Dal will eventually have a major say in strategy and seat adjustments. Both Devi Lal of Haryana and Karpoori Thakur in Bihar have been insisting on a merger with Charan Singh since, in their opinion, they are more confident of gaining an electoral advantage under the Charan Singh umbrella. From among the opposition parties, the Lok Dal emerged with the largest number of seats in the 1980 elections (41) and in at least three states; Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Bihar, the party is certain to play a decisive role. But at the same time, the merger moves and the conflicting announcements of alliances have confused many party workers. Says Lok Dal's Raghu Thakur from Madhya Pradesh: "Half the time we do not know which party we are in since we only read about new alliances in the newspapers."

But by last week, it was clear that pressure was building up for forging a common platform with the BJP proving the only recalcitrant element. Party leaders, however, are confident that with the prime ministership issue out of the way, the question of an agreement on opposition unity was now a mere formality. However even if that is still premature, and if the opposition has a long way to go before it imbibes that "spirit of 1977", it has at least tossed out the "spirit of 1979."

—RAJU SANTHANAM

ANDHRA PRADESH

Bhaskara's Benevolence

WITH the actual impact of Nadendla Bhaskara Rao's one-month tenure only now being felt all over the state as details of his misdemeanours slowly come to light, Andhra Pradesh will soon contribute its share to the ever-growing stream of inquiry commissions so popular in this country. Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao declared last month that he would constitute an official panel to probe into various allegations of misuse of power and wrongful reversal of policy decisions taken by the Government. Whatever the findings, one thing is patently clear: speed was never before seen to be so important as when Bhaskara Rao held sway over the state.

Between the dramatic 'assumption' of power and his inglorious dismissal, he cleared something like 3,000 files and as per his own guesstimate, took 31 'major' decisions, mostly purportedly concerned with public welfare. These have, however, prompted detractors to clamour loudly for a judicial inquiry and the allegations made suggest that he and some of his cronies took money to push the decisions.

Among the controversial issues—several of the decisions being mere reversals of those taken by the previous N.T. Rama Rao ministry—feature:

- the sudden exemption from purview of the Urban Land Ceiling Act (ULCA) granted to the holdings of the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad;
- permission to a big businessman to divert 10 per cent of rectified spirit for the manufacture of Indian made foreign liquor (IMFL) in the face of an acute alcohol shortage even for the drug industry;
- change of the Gur Control Order to allow a distillery in Chittoor to use jaggery for the production of alcohol;
- permission to set up 16 professional colleges, 11 to be located in the constituencies of legislators who joined his breakaway Telugu Desam faction;
- the extention of the Rs 2 a kilo rice scheme to cover families of more than five members giving each family five kilos a month and incurring a drain of Rs 44 crore from the state exchequer;
- the mass granting of grace marks to about 19,491 SSC candidates so that the daughter of a sympathetic Congress(I) MP could pass.

Many of the decisions are patently questionable and can be classified according to the major or minor irregularity involved. But as investigations increasingly reveal, they can also be seen to serve the ends of individuals either close to Bhaskara Rao or his lieutenants, or directed at the targets of his political courtship.

In the case of the land holdings now belonging to Mukarram Jah, the grandson of the last Nizam, the Government was to have procured most of the 291 acre area of the Chiraan Palace complex on Banjara Hills under the ULCA. Three years ago, Jah petitioned the Government that he be permitted to sell about 200 acres to the NASSR Cooperative Housing Society and surrender about 91 acres to the Government to clear off income and wealth tax dues totalling over Rs 7 crore. While two successive Congress(I) governments waited till 1982 to agree to the request, the Telugu Desam Government refused to grant exemption when it came to power. Jah then went to court, which stayed the Government's claim over the land. Bhaskara Rao leapt several steps further and even though the issue was in court, proceeded to reverse the Rama Rao decision.

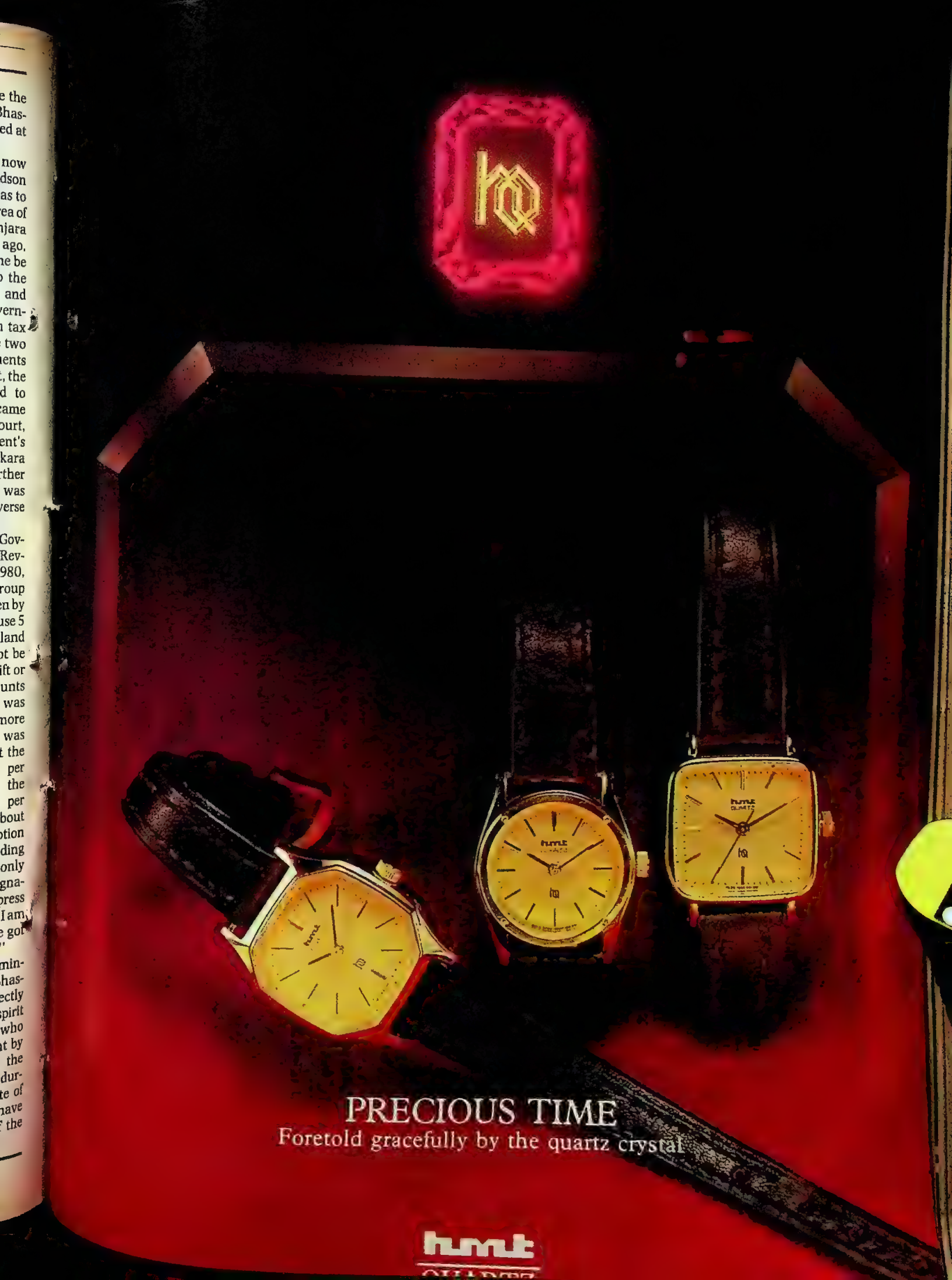
RAGHU RAI



Between the dramatic 'assumption' of power and his inglorious dismissal, Bhaskara Rao cleared something like 3,000 files and took 31 'major' decisions.

Apart from the fact that Government Order No. 4271—Revenue, dated September 10, 1980, states that construction of group housing has to be undertaken by the landowner himself, Clause 5 specifically mentions that land which is under ULCA cannot be transferred either by sale, gift or otherwise. On both these counts Bhaskara Rao's clearance was in violation of rules. Even more curious is the fact that Jah was selling the land to NASSR at the ridiculous rate of Rs 20 per square yard, whereas the market value is Rs 300 per square yard. There were about 1,000 cases pleading exemption from the ULCA still pending before the Government, but only Jah won Bhaskara Rao's signature. All Rao had to say at a press conference recently was: "If I am wrong, I am wrong. I have got the guts to pass the orders."

T. Jeevan Reddy, excise minister in both the NTR and Bhaskara Rao ministries, was directly involved in the rectified spirit case. The former minister who set an outrageous precedent by his unruly behaviour in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly during the sessions on the vote of confidence, is believed to have overruled the objections of the


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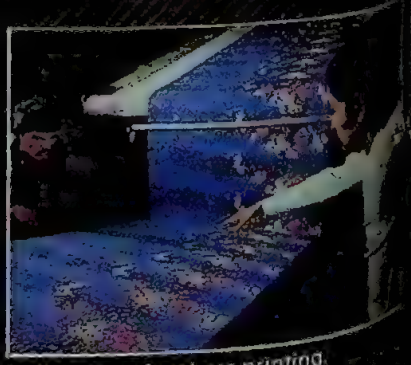
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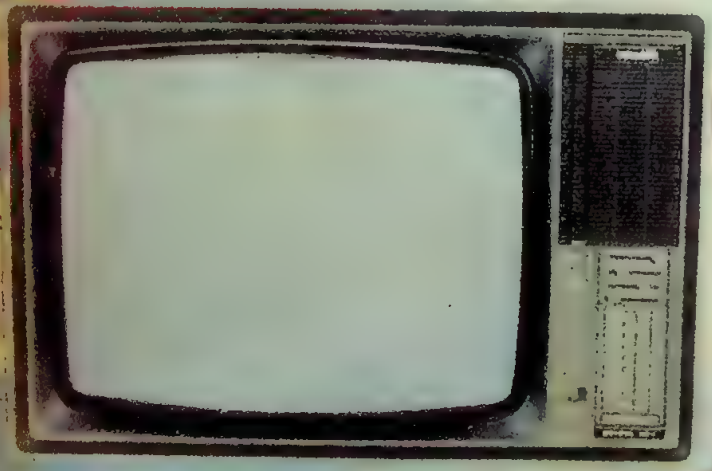


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excise commissioner and permitted a liquor manufacturer in Nacharam to divert 10 per cent of its alcohol to manufacture whisky, brandy, gin and rum adding up a tidy benefit of Rs 6 crore annually.

Reddy, it appears, did not stop with this. Disregarding the conditions of the Gur Control Order, he gave permission to a distillery in Chittoor to use jaggery instead of molasses in its brewing operations. Due to the current shortage of molasses in the country, the Central Molasses Board has been making allotments giving Andhra Pradesh 25,000 tonnes of molasses to be acquired from Bihar. The firm was entitled to 2,500 tonnes, it sought permission for jaggery in addition and although the Gur Control Order prohibits its use, Reddy used his offices to get by the order. The yield from jaggery is much higher than from molasses and since the quantity of jaggery permitted was not specified, the Chittoor distillery used about 10,000 tonnes, running its plant to optimum capacity and distilling about 35 lakh litres of alcohol.

According to the *Newstime*, a Hyderabad daily, Bhaskara Rao ordered the renewal of the letters of intent of five distilleries against the recommendations of an official committee. One of the beneficiaries was an MLA from West Godavari district who defected to Bhaskara Rao's group.

Bhaskara Rao raised the number of seats in 13 engineering colleges and allowed private managements to collect capitation fees on 48 seats. He also gave permission to start five more engineering colleges, 10 colleges of education, and one medical college for Muslims, 11 to be located in the constituencies of legislators who joined his group. And although he reduced tuition fees in engineering colleges from Rs 5,000 to Rs 3,000, private managements collected up to Rs 50,000 a seat as capitation fee.

Employees of the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams were to be paid 10 per cent of their basic pay, up to Rs 150, as pilgrim compensatory allowance to meet expenses caused by the visits of relatives and friends. Orphanages in the state were granted Rs 1 crore, and 23 district judges in the state were to be provided cars. However, the extension of the rice scheme proved the biggest drain. Said state Finance Minister N. Srinivasulu Reddi: "Already the state is spending Rs 160 crore on this rice scheme and the addition would mean a great burden."

Rayapati Sambasiva Rao, tobacco trader and Rajya Sabha member, played a big part in helping woo members of the NTR camp on Bhaskara Rao's behalf. Although he did not succeed in his efforts to



NTR calls on Mrs Gandhi

N.T. RAMA RAO

Getting Wiser

NT. RAMA RAO's October 5 visit to New Delhi has led to wild rumours. Four days after his wife's death due to cancer, he came from Hyderabad in the morning, met President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by appointment. He saw no opposition leaders and made no attacks on Mrs Gandhi. After a "tame" press conference, he flew back home.

This led to speculation that he may have struck a secret deal with Mrs Gandhi, that he would show no more interest in getting the Opposition parties together to fight her in the coming general elections. In turn, she will let him rule Andhra Pradesh undisturbed.

INDIA TODAY investigations reveal that these rumours have no basis. NTR the film star became a politician in a record time of nine months by opposing Mrs Gandhi's style of politics and winning the Andhra Assembly elections in January last year. He was the man who took the first initiative since the last general elections to unite the warring Opposition parties by organising a conclave in Vijayawada in May 1983. When he was unjustly dismissed in August, that once again provided a chance to the Opposition parties to come together.

By nature, NTR is emotional. Mrs Gandhi sent him a bouquet at the nursing home when he came to Delhi with his MLA's to meet Zail Singh. Touched by the gesture, he telephoned to thank her. When Shankar Dayal Sharma recalled him as chief minister, NTR believed that he was doing it under orders from the President and the prime minister and thanked them on the telephone. What is not known is that he also telephoned to thank all the Opposition leaders who stood by him in his fight and wrote personal letters to editors of 30 newspapers and periodicals for the moral support they lent him through their editorials and reportage.

His meeting with Mrs Gandhi, according to what NTR told his close friends in Hyderabad, was extremely business-like. He requested her for financial help to tackle the drought in the state and invited her to visit the affected areas. On her part, Mrs Gandhi promised all possible assistance and accepted the invitation.

There were no aides present at the meeting. So, even if they discussed something else, nobody knows what they talked about. Neither Mrs Gandhi's colleagues including Andhra Congress(I) leaders nor NTR's confidants have a clue to this. Andhra Congress(I) leaders, who visited the capital later pleaded ignorance. Indeed, they are reconciled to the fact that the Telugu Desam will wipe them out in the Lok Sabha poll. Should NTR dissolve the Assembly and ask for a fresh election to the state legislature, they fear the Congress(I) may be decimated in that too.

Further, "friendship" with Mrs Gandhi would mean the end of NTR the politician. If anybody is conscious of this, NTR certainly is. The month-long trauma during August-September has made NTR something of a politician, which he was not earlier.

Said I.K. Gujral, a protagonist of opposition unity: "As soon as he overcomes the shocks (of bypass surgery, ouster from power and of the death of his wife from cancer), NTR must call a meeting of opposition leaders, if only to put an end to all this speculation." Added Ramoji Rao, the Andhra newspaper baron who stood by NTR throughout: "There's no occasion for NTR to attack Mrs Gandhi now. Why should he pounce on her when there is no need to?" Come election announcement, and all this may change.

—S. VENKAT NARAYAN

muster support for Bhaskara Rao, he managed to have some of his "requests" attended to immediately. Apart from Bhaskara Rao ordering an engineering college for Sambasiva Rao's Guntur district, he also ordered that an extra three marks be given to all those who had failed in the April 1984 SSC examinations. Thanks to this, Sambasiva Rao's daughter, Devikarani, who had failed the social studies paper by just three marks, got through within four days of Bhaskara Rao becoming the chief minister.

As the findings of investigations initiated by Chief Minister Rama Rao and the Andhra Pradesh press find expression, it is obvious that Bhaskara Rao was well aware that his period in office would be a very limited one.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

A. PRBHAKAR RAO



Balaiah shows his depleted sorghum crop

ANDHRA PRADESH

The Big Dry



VILLAGERS in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh hold an annual festival of flowers on October 2 to worship Batakamma, the Goddess of Life, in the belief that it will bring another year of abundant harvest and prosperity.The celebrations this year, however, were marred by the fact that there was not enough water anywhere to immerse the idol in.

That situation, more than anything else, symbolised the agony of Andhra Pradesh trapped in the throes of a protracted and unrelenting drought. Whether it is the uplands in the deltaic districts, the red soil tracts of Telangana or the perpetual rain-starved region of Rayalaseema, the signs are the same:dying crops and arid brown fields stretching into the distance. Farming and food production plans have gone totally haywire, farm workers are without jobs and drinking water is in crucial short supply.

In 12 of the state's 23 districts, which are the worst hit, overall rainfall was short by between 20 and 60 per cent.In a memorandum to the Centre, state Chief Secretary Shravan Kumar put the estimate of the total loss at about Rs 850 crore and requested assistance for the state to the tune of Rs 369.20 crore.Last fortnight, Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao flew into Delhi and spent an hour with Mrs Gandhi to acquaint her with the problem. On his return, he went on the air to announce that the prime minister would be visiting the state shortly to make a personal tour of the drought-hit areas.

However, Mrs Gandhi delayed the decision on assistance to coincide with her visit, scheduled for October 14. Meanwhile, NTR announced that the state was releasing Rs 20 crore for relief and asked for Rs 60 crore from the Centre to meet the immediate needs.For the state Government, the urgent task is to reduce the suffering of the farmers and check the sharp rise in prices of essential commodities.

That will not be an easy task without massive injections of funds. The state's food production will fall woefully short of the 125 lakh tonnes target for 1984-85. Current crop forecasts predict a fall of at least 14 lakh tonnes of rice and 15 lakh tonnes of other grains. With the groundnut crop expected to be less than half of last year's figure of 16.96 lakh tonnes, edible oil supply will be severely affected.

All across the state, the laments of the farmers have replaced the normally busy sounds of harvesting. Says Sriram Reddy, sarpanch of Mallapur, whose groundnut crop was virtually nil while the sorghum and millet crops he had planted are pest-infected because of untimely rain: "Nature alone can save us and not any government.Where were they during the past three months when we needed their help the most?" Adds P.Balaiah, another farmer:"I only got 80 kg of sorghum crop against 800 kg last year." Smaller farmers have been even worse off. Manupati Somaiah's sorghum crop failed on his 2.5 acre field and he is now back to the old family profession of running a piggery. Says he:"Raising pigs is much easier but the problem is nobody will have money to buy my produce."

The worst hit are the thousands of farm workers who have been rendered jobless by the drought.Even those who maaged to secure jobs had to work at reduced rates. In districts like Krishna, the daily wage had dropped from Rs 12 to Rs 6 because of the situation. Many of the farm workers have migrated to the cities in search of work on construction sites.

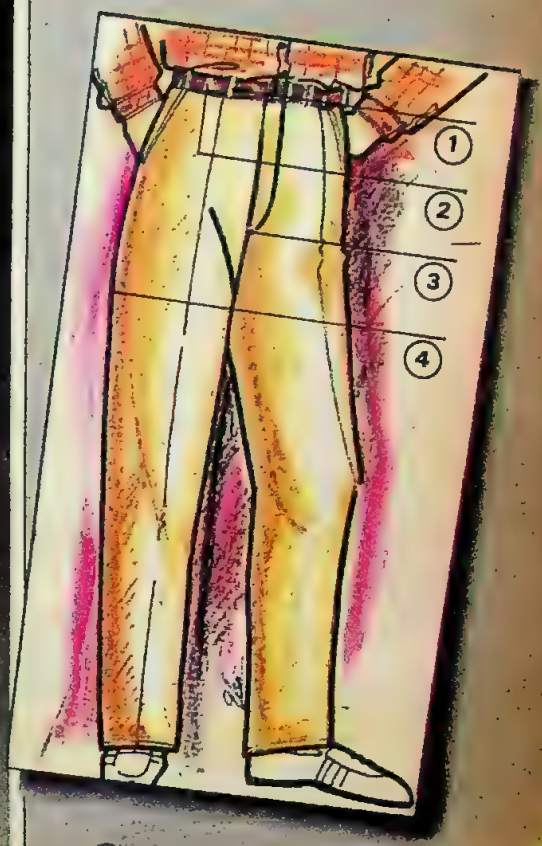
Inevitably, clashes were reported in many areas as desperate farmers tried to divert water from irrigation channels for their fields, thus depriving other farmers of their quota. In other areas, villagers fought over pumpsets and water pipes.

In all, crops in about 40 lakh hectares out of 65 lakh hectares have been damaged, affecting the earnings of around 32 lakh farmers.State Civil Supplies Commissioner Charan Das Arha says that they have asked for twice the normal rice supply from the Central pool and an additional 2.28 lakh tonnes of edible oil. But farmers and workers are pessimistic since very few will have the funds to make purchases unless fresh loans for short duration crops are provided and drought relief work picks up on a massive scale.Even livestock farmers are contemplating distress sales of cattle since the fodder production in the state is far short of requirements.By last fortnight, farmers anxiously gazing at the skies in anticipation of the north-east monsoon were rewarded by the first rains they have witnessed in months. But even if the rain gods finally smile down on Andhra Pradesh, they may be a little too late to salvage the ravages of the drought that threatens to usher in yet another crisis in what has been, in many ways, a year of unusual deprivation.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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(2) Fused waist-band to prevent unsightly 'roll-over'.

(3) Bar-stitching at stress points.

(4) Chain-stitching on the side seams and seat seams.

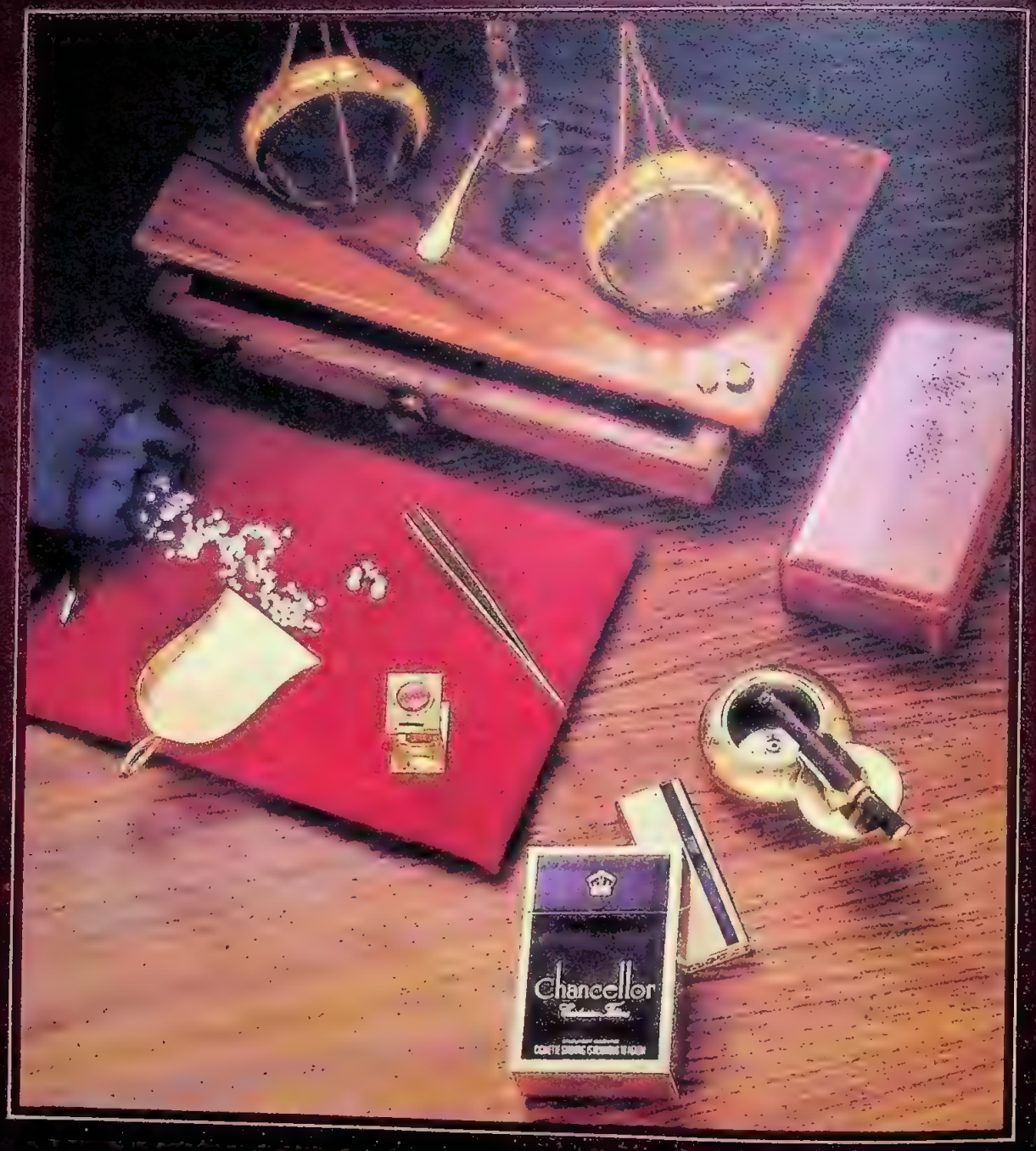
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Govan/CE/3/84

MADHYA PRADESH

Raising a Storm



"PEOPLE say Godse is dead but my contention is that those who believe in his philosophy are still alive ....Look out for them. When you find them dump them in the ocean." This indirect tirade against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) could not have occured in more inhospitable surroundings. But what has actually led to a fierce controversy in Gwalior, for years the bastion of the RSS, is that it did not come from a member of the Congress(I) as might be expected but A.N. Pathak, the flamboyant deputy inspector general (DIG) of police, stationed in the city.

In fact, the reaction to the controversial speech was so severe that more than a fortnight afterwards the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was threatening to raise the issue in the state Assembly, which began its session on October 10. In the first week of October, a former minister and BJP MLA, Shitala Sahai, circulated photographs to reporters in Bhopal showing Pathak before a microphone with a slogan against the RSS and BJP in the background, and even the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Sunderlal Patwa, demanded Pathak's transfer.

The BJP's complaint was that Pathak had launched a frontal attack against the RSS by name and that he had clearly violated all the norms governing his official conduct. The transcript of the speech circulated in Bhopal, however, revealed that nowhere in it was the RSS named. In his defence, DIG Pathak told the Government that he addressed a meeting of the National Integration Council and that the photograph circulated was of a dharna of Harijans in the morning and that it was taken when he was trying to pacify them.

This explanation seems to have been readily accepted by the state Government, and Congress(I) leaders in Bhopal could not have asked for more from Pathak. By the middle of October Pathak's speech and subsequent campaign had so thoroughly demoralised the BJP that though it had originally planned to take the offensive, it was instead forced to go on the defensive. This was mainly because Pathak, without actually naming them, had clearly suggested that the killers of Gandhi were from the RSS, which still continued to be active in the guise of the BJP.

What sparked off the controversy was probably the BJP campaign earlier protesting against the deteriorating law and order situation in the city. In early September the BJP paper *Swadesh* had published a report suggesting that "Gambler", a notorious dacoit of Gwalior, was caught in Bhopal and later taken to Gwalior and killed in cold blood. The report was followed by a series of stories by *Swadesh* and other papers on robberies in Gwalior.



The BJP's complaint was that Pathak had clearly violated all the norms governing his official conduct.

For the BJP, which had been looking for a popular issue, this was an opportunity not to be missed. Within days the party went on a dharna to protest against the deteriorating law and order situation which culminated in the burning of an effigy of a policeman. Pathak claimed that the campaign was directed against him, a charge the BJP leaders denied.

Overnight, a Harijan organisation came to the policemen's rescue. Led by Bansilal Mandelia and Nikki Pahelwan, both of whom have been picked up by the police in the past, and calling itself an "anti-RSS, anti-BJP organisation" this body passed two resolutions. One resolution condemned the moves by the RSS to prevent the entry of Harijans into temples and the other resolution to protest against the BJP agitation against the police.

The "Harijan" dharna started just a day after the BJP agitation ended. *Swadesh* closely following developments, accused the police of stage-managing the Harijan morcha to counter the influence of the BJP agitation. *Swadesh* said it spoke to those sitting in the dharna who related how they were brought to the spot in police jeeps. Pathak denied the allegations saying: "Do you think that I am so popular as to arrange for 10,000 persons?"

For a man at the centre of the controversy Pathak is anything but repentant. He said his public meeting was a spontaneous reaction to the campaign against him and the police in Gwalior city, and added that he felt it was time police officers were allowed a forum to ventilate their grievances.

What Pathak is actually asking for is an amendment to Rule 3 B of the Police Force Restricted Practices Act. The relevant portion clearly states that no police officer can address a public meeting. According to a government official, Pathak's defence that he was addressing a meeting of the integration council does not really hold water since such a meeting has to be called by the convenor, the meeting is usually a closed door affair and a representative of the RSS is always called. In Pathak's integration meeting apparently none of these three points was fulfilled.

However by skilfully using the committee as a cover Pathak had delivered a speech that would put any Gwalior Congressman to shame. Some of the excerpts are illuminating:

"When the police effigy was burnt in Gwalior one person was smiling (reference to Shitala Sahai BJP MLA)....it is similar to the smile of those responsible for Gandhi's murder when a man wearing khaki pants (a reference to the RSS) took out a revolver to kill the father of the nation."

"Where were all these people when Punjab was on the boil? Many were scared when they received threatening letters (a reference to BJP President Vajpayee)."

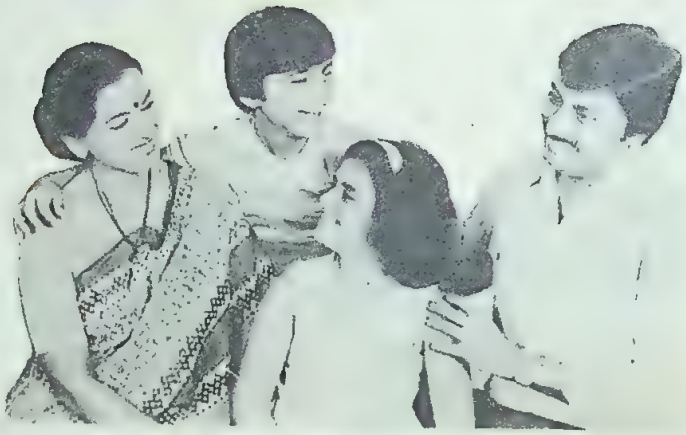
Pathak feels that following the response to his meeting the BJP is running for cover because the Harijans are up in arms. BJP leader Sardar Angre, however, says: "Pathak's speech has actually been a boon to us. His antics would help us in our election campaign. We want him to stay." But there are other observers like Ramashankar Singh, Lok Dal MLA, who see the Pathak outburst as a dangerous signal. Says he: "Police officers, like dacoits, are glorified in the dacoity areas. They are so used to adulation that they become very sensitive when criticised. Incidents of this type will continue as long as we glorify police officers who kill dacoits in false encounters."

—RAJU SANTHANAM in Gwalior

Govan/ CE | 3 | 84

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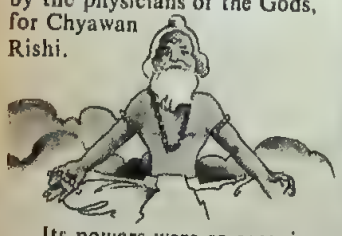
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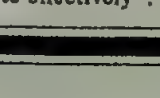
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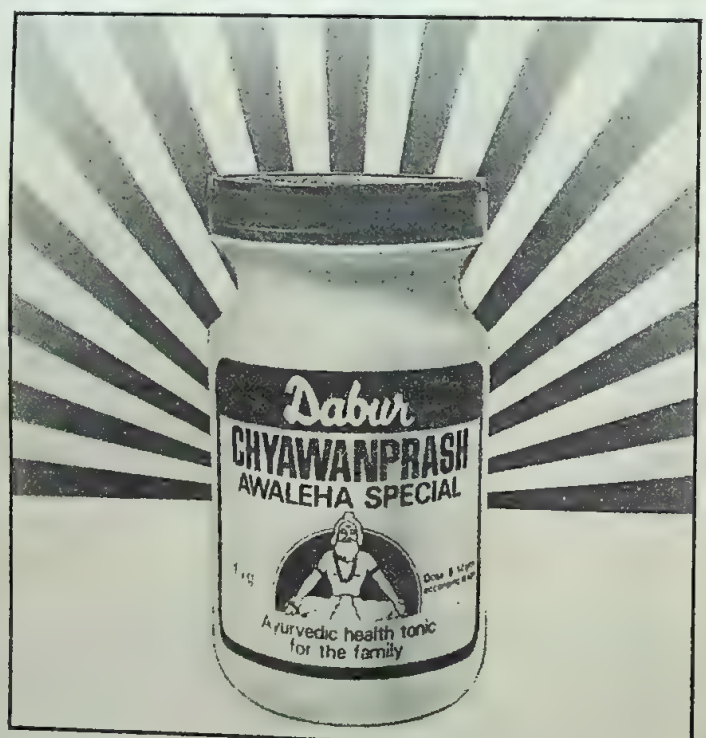


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WEST BENGAL

Back to the Masses



WITH the Lok Sabha elections drawing near, West Bengal's ruling Marxists have undertaken a massive drive to renew contacts with the people. The party cadres and frontal organisation members have been instructed to "go to the masses" and the normally business-like atmosphere at 33, Alimuddin Street has become even more brisk, with the leadership keeping close tabs on the activities of the different party units to ensure that the directive is carried out. Evidently, the unexpected trouncing at the recent Belgachia by-election and earlier defeats in rural constituencies, all at the hands of the Congress(I), have rudely awoken the party to the not so pleasant fact that after as long as seven years in office the party has definitely drifted away from the masses.

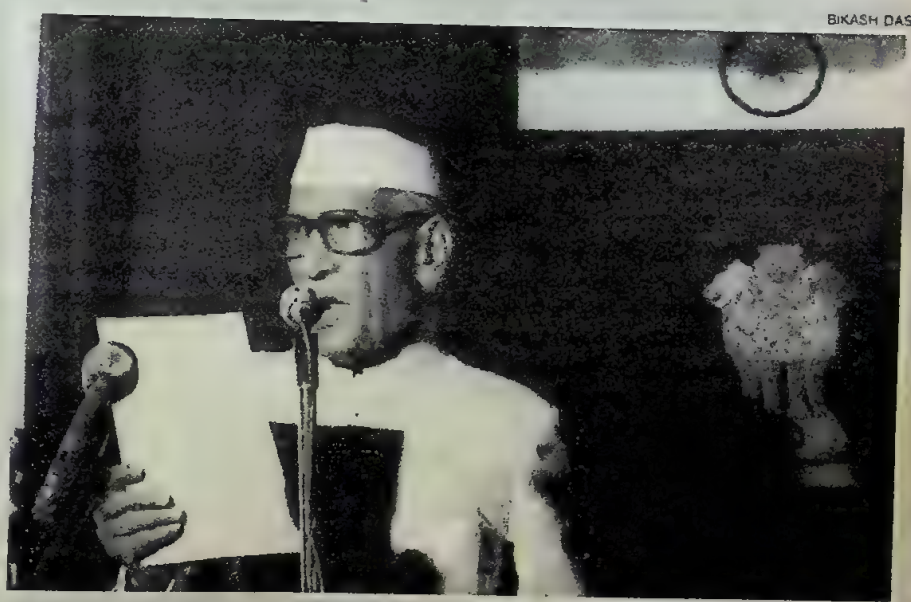
As a first step towards renewing contacts with the masses, in August and September, the party undertook a massive signature campaign in favour of an eight-point memorandum listing the ways in which the Centre was denying West Bengal its dues. Talking to INDIA TODAY last fortnight, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, a state committee member of the CPI(M) said, "We collected 70 lakh signatures from all over the state and two of our MP's, Satya Sadhan Chakravarti and Saifuddin carried the enormous bundles to Zail Singh at Rashtrapati Bhavan." While this effort may not alter the situation in West Bengal's favour, the fact that so many signatures could be collected is an indication of the seriousness with which party instructions are being followed.

The by-election reverse brought home the harsh truth that with no meaningful opposition in the state, corruption had become the order of the day within the

WEST BENGAL

Welcome Shift

BIKASH DAS



Dikshit being sworn in: "no politics"

OLD GOVERNORS, unlike their soldiering counterparts, never seem to fade away. Last fortnight, Calcutta's Raj Bhavan opened its ornate doors to the octogenarian Uma Shankar Dikshit who will fill the void left by the sudden departure of former governer, A.P.Sharma.Dikshit, who had earlier refused the governership of Andhra Pradesh on grounds of advancing age, was more surprised than anybody else when he received a message from the prime ministers' office stating that he had been appointed governor of West Bengal. It was, as he says, an offer he couldn't refuse. "I could not say no", he told INDIA TODAY after taking over, "the prime minister herself told me that though I was old in years, she did not think my brain had also aged."

Neither, if his utterances are to be believed, will the Left Front. After their running and often acrimonious battles with Sharma, there was intense speculation within the party regarding the new governor and the kind of attitude he would adopt. But so far, the new incumbent gives every indication of going strictly by the book. "I will not be pressurised either by the Centre or the Left Front here in toeing their particular lines. I will take each decision in accordance with the dictates of my conscience," he firmly declares.

That kind of talk is music to the ears of Left Front leaders who have had difficulties with both of Dikshit's predecessors, Sharma and B.D. Pandey. Even though the Centre had once again disdained to consult the chief minister before announcing Dikshit's appointment this time, the Left Front let it pass. Instead, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, who was then in New Delhi, telephoned the state chief secretary with instructions that Dikshit should be given a proper welcome with one minister from each constituent party on hand to greet him.

But that did not mean that the Front was abandoning its efforts to have the post of governor abolished on the grounds that it is being blatantly misused. However, from what Dikshit says, the Front leaders may have no worries on his score. "I do not want any confrontation with the government of which I am the constitutional head. Many people have come to see me. But just because I listen nobody should think that I would act in the manner they want me to act. I will definitely not take a political view of things."

The sincerity in his statements is difficult to fault which means that Left Front leaders can rest easy without the fear of flanking attacks from Raj Bhavan, at least in the near future.Dikshit says that for the past two years his sole preoccupation has been the study of comparative religion. "I have been through the teachings of all religions from Hinduism to Christianity and Judaism", he says, "and I have realised that the most important thing in life is to follow the dictates of your own inner self. Politicking has no place there." If that is the effect religious study has, perhaps it should be made compulsory for all gubernatorial candidates.

—SUMANTA SEN

party. Senior leaders like Chief Minister Jyoti Basu reprimanded party cadres for forgetting the "cardinal principle of a Communist—that he should never cease to be polite and humble while dealing with the people." The reprimand virtually amounted to admission of the criticism gaining ground that by virtue of being in office, Marxist field workers had also taken popular support for granted. To rectify past omissions, the party has adopted a door-to-door campaign policy to acquaint themselves with the people's grievances. The purpose, according to the party leaders, is that "even though we may not solve all their problems, the fact that we are at least listening to them would make the people realise that we want to help".

The realisation, though somewhat belated, has also dawned on the Marxist leadership that even with the "limited resources" at their command, some of the ministries could perform more creditably than at present. The portfolios of milk supply, power and transport, for example, could be handled far more effectively and in the process give the urban voter less cause to complain. Party-level committees have been formed to oversee the functioning of these departments and reviews are being held regularly to find ways of improving things even marginally in these spheres. This exercise is being conducted with a fair degree of seriousness, since if the party is to retain the two Calcutta Lok Sabha seats it must provide some physical evidence of a competent administration.

But if the Marxists are pulling up their socks, there is clear dissatisfaction in the party that the other major constituents of the Left Front are not taking similar measures. Instead, the Marxists are noting with dismay the increasing tendency among sections in the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Forward Bloc to openly criticise the CPI(M) in a manner more suited to parties in the Opposition. Unsavoury developments like Public Works Minister Jatin Chakraborty's public criticism of Finance Minister Ashok Mitra have reportedly so angered the chief minister that he is contemplating a cabinet reshuffle after the Lok Sabha elections. Basu's displeasure is evident from first-hand accounts of his utterances at the Front meetings. He is particularly unhappy at the way news of differences amongst Left Front constituents are leaked to the press. He has often accused leaders of the different parties of being responsible. In private conversations with senior cabinet colleagues, he has expressed reservations about the functioning of ministers belonging to the smaller constituents like the Revolutionary Communist Party of India and the Socialist Party.

While there is a general consensus that the front needs to be revamped, there seems to be no agreement on how to go about it. The Front is extremely wary of stepping on the toes of those within the Front lest they shift their loyalties. As a Marxist leader pointed out, "We know that people like Jatin Chakraborty or Ram Chatterjee (Marxist Forward Bloc) are not exactly helpful in brightening the Front's image, but in the given situation we have to live with them. That is the reality, and nothing can be done about it." And given this reality, the Marxists have opted for what is perhaps the only way left open for them: trying to improve their own performance without bothering about others, even if it means reducing the Front to an even bigger paper organisation than ever before.

—SUMANTA SEN

FIREWORKS

Danger Signs

DIWALI is a time for festivity and happiness for many but not so for quite a few. For a considerably large number of young people, the festival ends with a miserable stay in the hospital. Last year, on Diwali, as the night exploded outside, a young professor from the IIT and his research assistants stood by the burns wards of two Delhi hospitals to see how many seriously injured people landed up in hospital —and why.

The results of their study on firework injuries during Diwali—the first study of its kind—were both alarming and somewhat surprising. Surprising because some of the fireworks that are commonly considered safe—*anars*, interlinked *ladis* and the innocuous looking rotating wheels—are in fact the most volatile of all. And alarming because almost 95 per cent of the households surveyed as a follow-up of the study were completely ignorant that the safest and quickest way to treat burns is simply with cold water.

The sample survey suggests that the number of seriously injured people throughout the country during Diwali could well run into several lakhs. "In England," said Professor Dinesh Mohan, the team leader, "only a few hundred people get burnt in the whole year. Here the number is phenomenal." Moreover the people who do get seriously injured—serious enough, that is, to bring them to hospital—are not naive little children but young adults of around the age of 20. The reason: part brazenness and in major part, dangerous fireworks. The conical, paper-bound *anar*, for instance—unlike its earthen and much safer counterpart —can be lit while in the hand. More often than not it tends to explode there. The interlinked *ladis* often stop cracking when only half used and it is while relighting them that they cause injuries. The little rotating wheel is difficult to light on the ground, so this too is held in the hand and often burns the holder. The little bomb contains a large quantity of high voltage powder tightly packed and so the explosive content is very high.



The offending crackers

Around 88 per cent of the injuries sustained are hand injuries. Worried parents, in their hurry and panic, usually rush their children to the nearest tube of Burnol. Many have been known to apply oils, fats and even toothpaste and shaving cream. Actually the study claims that nothing works like water: simply immerse the injured area under cold water till the pain disappears.

The most effective way of permanently stopping the accidents would of course be to ban the lethal paper *anar*, and to reduce the explosive content in the crackers.

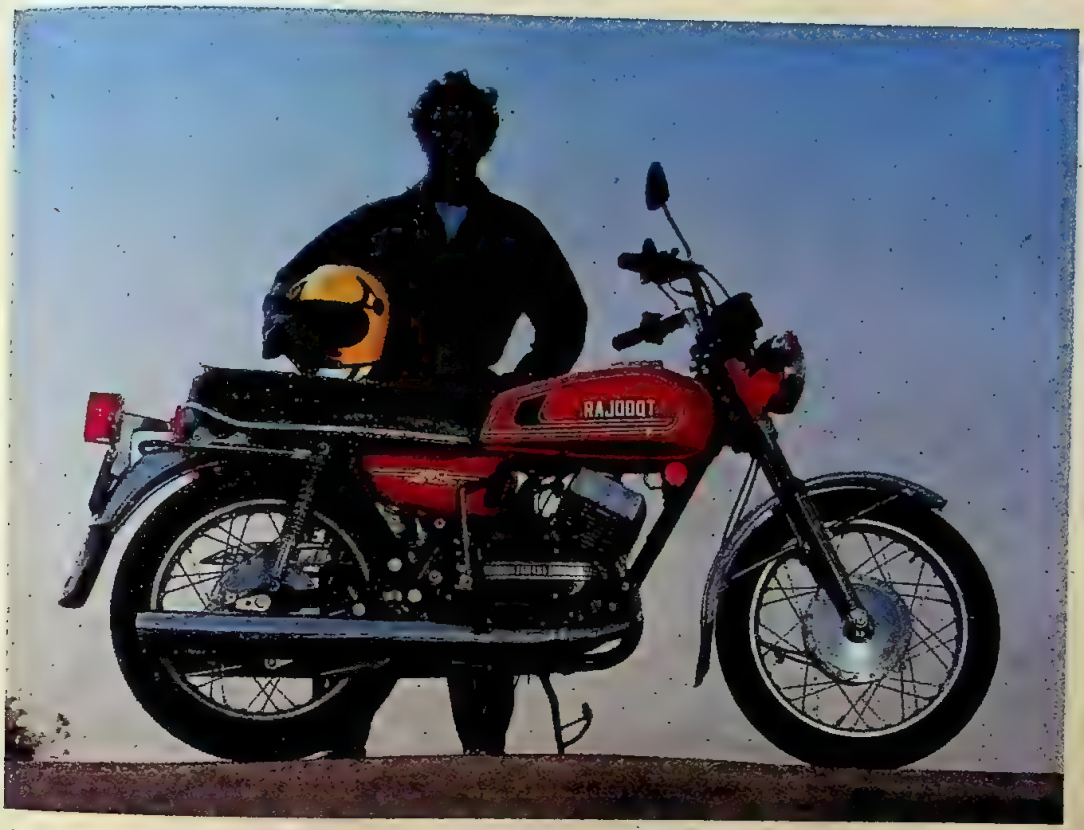
The survey team will again stand by the burns wards of selected hospitals while doctors, as every year, set up an assembly line to treat the hundreds of agonised patients that stream in on the festive night, lamenting that a little care would save a lot of unhappiness.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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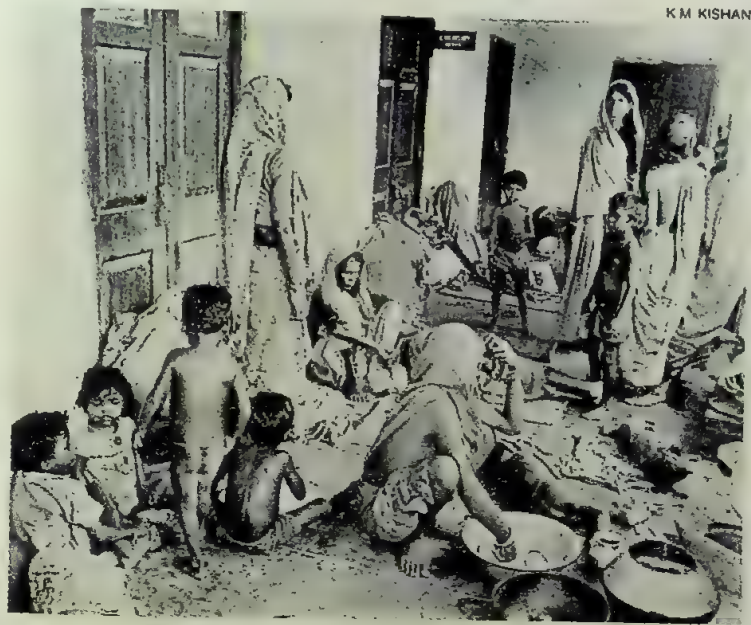
A Breach of Faith



"PENNY wise, pound foolish," goes the old saying. In Bihar, the truth of the statement has hit home with tragic effect: flood waters devastated the northern districts of the state between July and September, leaving 110 dead at the last count, and causing damage to property worth Rs 300 crore. Much of this could have been minimised if only the Government had vigorously taken up the maintenance work of embankments and barrages before the monsoon. On the contrary, it slashed its spending on maintenance from the usual Rs 50 lakh to Rs 30 lakh, amidst allegations that even this sum was not properly spent. "The tragedy was caused by an inefficient Government and corrupt officials," charged Karpoori Thakur, leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly.

The northern part of Bihar—stretching from Champaran district on the Indo-Nepal border to Katihar on the state border with West Bengal—has always been vulnerable to floods. But this year the damage was particularly extensive: rivers flooded over in as many as 23 of the 38 districts of the state, affecting a population of 15 million. Around 1.1 lakh houses were destroyed, and standing crops in over 12 lakh hectares inundated. "All this could have been avoided had the Government rationalised its economy measures and allowed its machinery to act with foresight," commented a senior state Congress(I) leader. "It is foolish and malicious to say that due to the economy drive, the protective work was neglected," retorted Chief Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh. But facts suggest that much of the damage could indeed have been prevented.

In Saharsa district the embankment on the Kosi river breached on September 4 due to sheer neglect of maintenance work. This particular embankment has been exposed to the fury of floods for the past 30 years, but never gave way because of the regular routine as well as capital maintenance. But a five-km stretch had been found to be vulnerable as far back as 1977, and last year a team of experts from the Central Water and Power Commission studied the problem and suggested that a two-km-long "retired bund" be constructed to reinforce it. The Central Government had in fact even allotted a sum of Rs 2 crore for the bund, but the money was sadly enough, not utilised until May.



K M KISHAN

Shelter for women and children: little relief

Another unfortunate coincidence was that the entire engineering set-up in Kosi—from the chief engineer to junior engineers—was changed. The result was that few of the newcomers had any experience in flood control. The move was routine, but particularly inopportune. Likewise, when the Burhi Gandak river breached its embankment in Samastipur district—affecting a population of 1.5 lakh—officials had to admit, however belatedly, that not even routine maintenance had been carried out for the past six years. District Magistrate J.N. Tripathy told newsmen last fortnight that though a sum of Rs 2.4 lakh had been sent for this very purpose, it came in May—much too late, for the monsoon began by the time formalities could be completed.

Ironically, expert committees instituted by the Central government had as far back as 1964 suggested that an early flood warning system be set up. This was not done in Bihar. Again, in 1970, a ministers' committee recommended that flood forecasting centres and flood meteorological offices be set up in all flood-prone areas, but again Bihar ignored this advice—at great cost to itself.

If on the one hand, the government neglected the prevention, its ministers proved they couldn't handle the relief, either. Initially, the official machinery collapsed because the state's non-gazetted officers went on a long strike on September 4, the day the Kosi breached. Again it was a coincidence that the strike should take place just then, but it certainly hampered operations. Next, Relief Minister Lahatan Choudhary caused his Government much embarrassment by his selective implementation of relief measures. Choudhary, who represents Saharsa, was surrounded by hostile and abusive mobs on his visit to the flood-affected areas of his district. He was practically forced to accept responsibility for the Government's incompetence in dealing with the problem, and he offered to resign—an offer he later retracted. But his consequent eagerness to make up for it to his constituents got the Opposition angry, particularly the Janata Party, which staged a dharna before the speaker's chamber to highlight the plight of other drought-affected districts.

Though only 10 of Saharsa's 16 blocks were affected as compared to all of Katihar's 11, Saharsa received preferential treatment. In fact, property worth Rs 1.01 crore was destroyed in Katihar, to Saharsa's Rs 38 lakh. Yet only 544 boats were deployed in Katihar, rescuing a mere 379 people, while 1,237 boats were pressed into service in Saharsa, rescuing over 30,000 people. "The discrimination was so apparent that Mrs Gandhi had to assure Youth Congress(I) chief Tariq Anwar, who represents Katihar, that his constituency would not be neglected," confided a Congress(I) leader.

If the present mood of the people of Bihar is any indication, things could get pretty hot for the Congress(I) in the forthcoming elections for as many as 30 of the 54 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state were hit by floods. Meanwhile, the state Government has asked for central assistance to the tune of Rs 102 crore for flood relief. If it can manage to distribute it fairly and ostentatiously enough, there is just a chance that it might regain lost ground.

—FARZAND AHMED

KARNATAKA

Reaffirming Loyalties



IN POLITICS, goes the old saying, there are no permanent friends, no permanent enemies: only permanent interests. Not so for Ramarao Gundu Rao, the burly former chief minister of Karnataka, who proved the adage wrong by standing by his friend, F.M. Khan, the controversial Rajya Sabha member, who was unceremoniously expelled from the Congress(I) recently. Rao met party leader Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi last week and pleaded with her to revoke Khan's expulsion order. He told her that while he was still loyal to her, he would not break with Khan. Mrs Gandhi is said to have relented and told Rao that she would reconsider Khan's expulsion order within a fortnight. In the meanwhile, she has asked Rao to keep Khan on a tight leash and prevent him from making embarrassing statements to the press. After the meeting, Rao declared: "I have asked Madam (Mrs Gandhi) to reconsider Khan's expulsion and I will stand by whatever decision she takes. I am a loyal Congress(I) worker." And Khan immediately asked his supporters to end their hunger strike in front of the party office in Bangalore. "I am still a Congressman and I will always remain one," he said.

Rao's meeting with Mrs Gandhi was the climax of a fortnight-long drama in the state Congress(I) party which saw another senior leader, Harnahalli Ramaswamy's suspension order being revoked. Ramaswamy was suspended for his role in motivating H.C. Srikantiah, another Congress(I) leader, to form a third force in Karnataka politics (the other two being the lobbies led by Gundu Rao and Veerappa Moily). Just when Ramaswamy's suspension was threatening to blow into a major issue, A.K. Antony the newly-appointed Congress(I) general secretary was sent to Bangalore to cool tempers and patch up the differences. After Srikantiah and Ramaswamy agreed not to push the third force concept any more the suspension was revoked. The next day an optimistic Antony said: "Whatever our problems, we are sure they can be solved by mutual discussion and persuasion."

Antony's reticence over the Khan episode was understandable. The high command's knee-jerk reaction to Khan's campaign for a better deal for the so-called loyalists or those who stood by Mrs Gandhi when she was out of power had deeper implications. His expulsion was a warning to dissidents in the party to mend their ways. The "harsh action" against Khan was also because there were strong rumours that he was planning to defect to Menaka Gandhi's Rashtriya Sanjay Manch. Overnight Khan became a political leper. K.H. Patil, the state party chief, even welcomed the decision stating: "The party will not tolerate any indiscipline from a member however high up he may be."

While Khan's detractors in the party, and there are many, welcomed the decision to expel him it put Rao into a tight corner. He was forced to admit his position on the issue and finally decided he needed Khan's friendship as much as he needed the Congress(I)'s. Rao's friendship with Khan dates back to 1966 when he was president of the Kushalnagar town municipal board and Khan, a rich coffee planter. When Rao made a bid to move up the political ladder, Khan, with his wealthy background, helped him with finance.

Rao with Khan: a helping hand

MYSORE NEWS PHOTOS



Both became staunch Sanjay Gandhi loyalists and when Mrs Gandhi was out of power, stood by her. Rao was rewarded with the chief ministership of Karnataka while Khan was made a Rajya Sabha member. Khan behaved like an extra-constitutional authority when Rao was in power and put him into several embarrassing spots. But Rao always forgave him saying: "If I have to choose between chief ministership and Khan's friendship I would choose the latter."

The reason why the high command is even willing to reconsider its decision to expel Khan is that Rao is still the most powerful Congress(I) leader in the state and has the backing of around 25 of the 81 MLA's in the party. Although Khan may not have much local support, he has a reputation for creating trouble and coupled with the fact that he is a Muslim he could stir up unwanted dissidence, something the party can ill afford at this stage. Rao is now being asked to stand for the Lok Sabha elections, a move that is welcomed by his detractors who see it as a step to remove him from the state political scene. Rao after his ignominious defeat in the assembly elections last year is himself keen on standing for an election in an attempt to prove his clout.

But the infighting in the state Congress(I) party that has prevented it from toppling Ramakrishna Hegde's "brittle" Government and the Andhra blunder have made the party's chances in the Lok Sabha poll extremely bleak. Said one leader: "We had a fifty-fifty chance before the Andhra episode but after that and with the Janata Government still in power here, our chances are down to 25 per cent." Even the most optimistic of the leaders estimated that if an election was held right now the party would win 10 to 15 of the 28 seats in Karnataka. In 1980 it won 27 out of 28. It is for this reason that 16 Congress(I) leaders, including five Union ministers have been called to New Delhi on October 12 to discuss the party's poll prospects. The discordant notes are likely to become louder when the tickets for the Lok Sabha poll are to be decided. Already there is apprehension that party General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi and his clutch of advisors are going to select only their favourites. Moreover, Rajiv until recently has never really made any serious attempt to get along with



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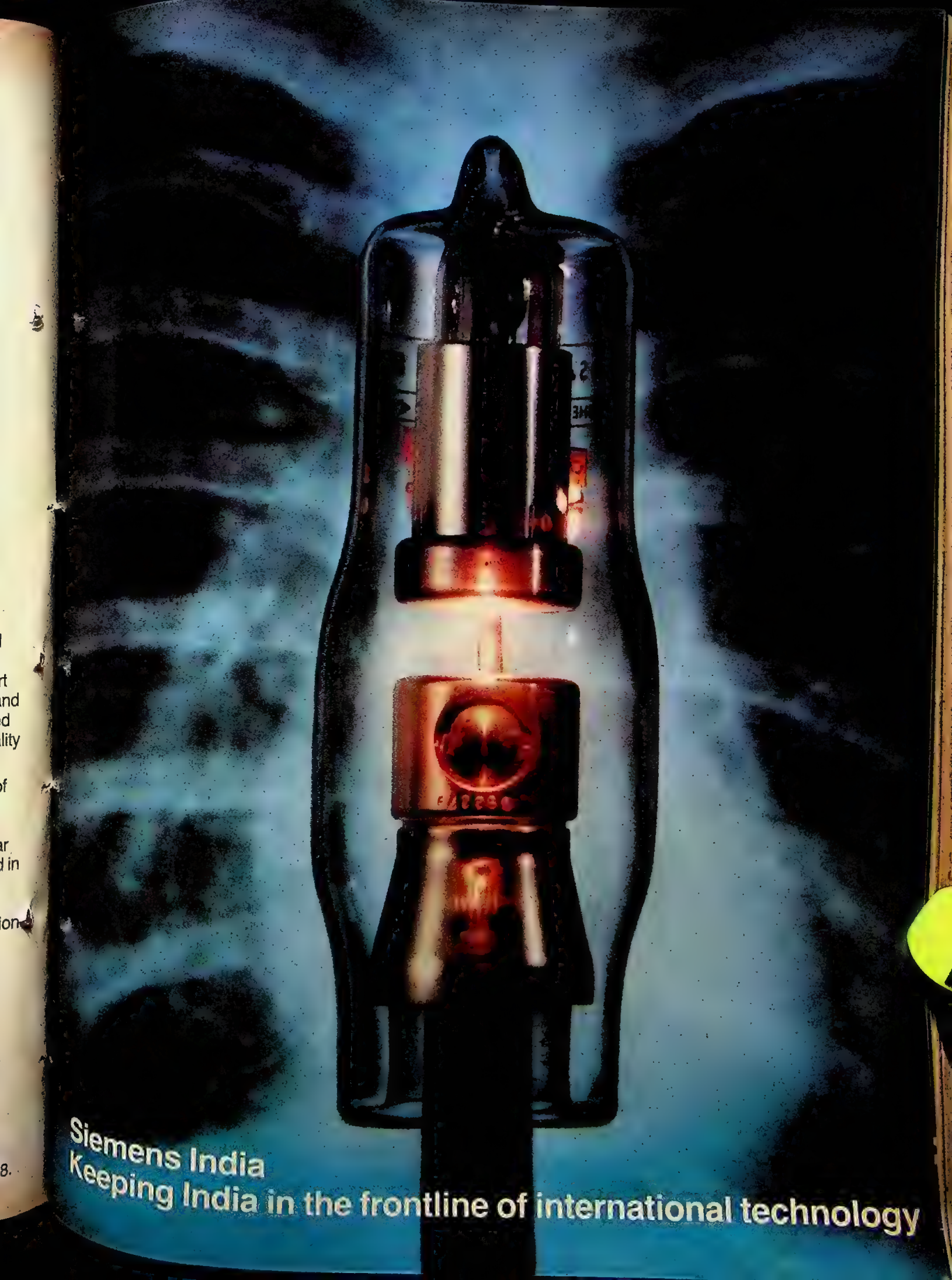


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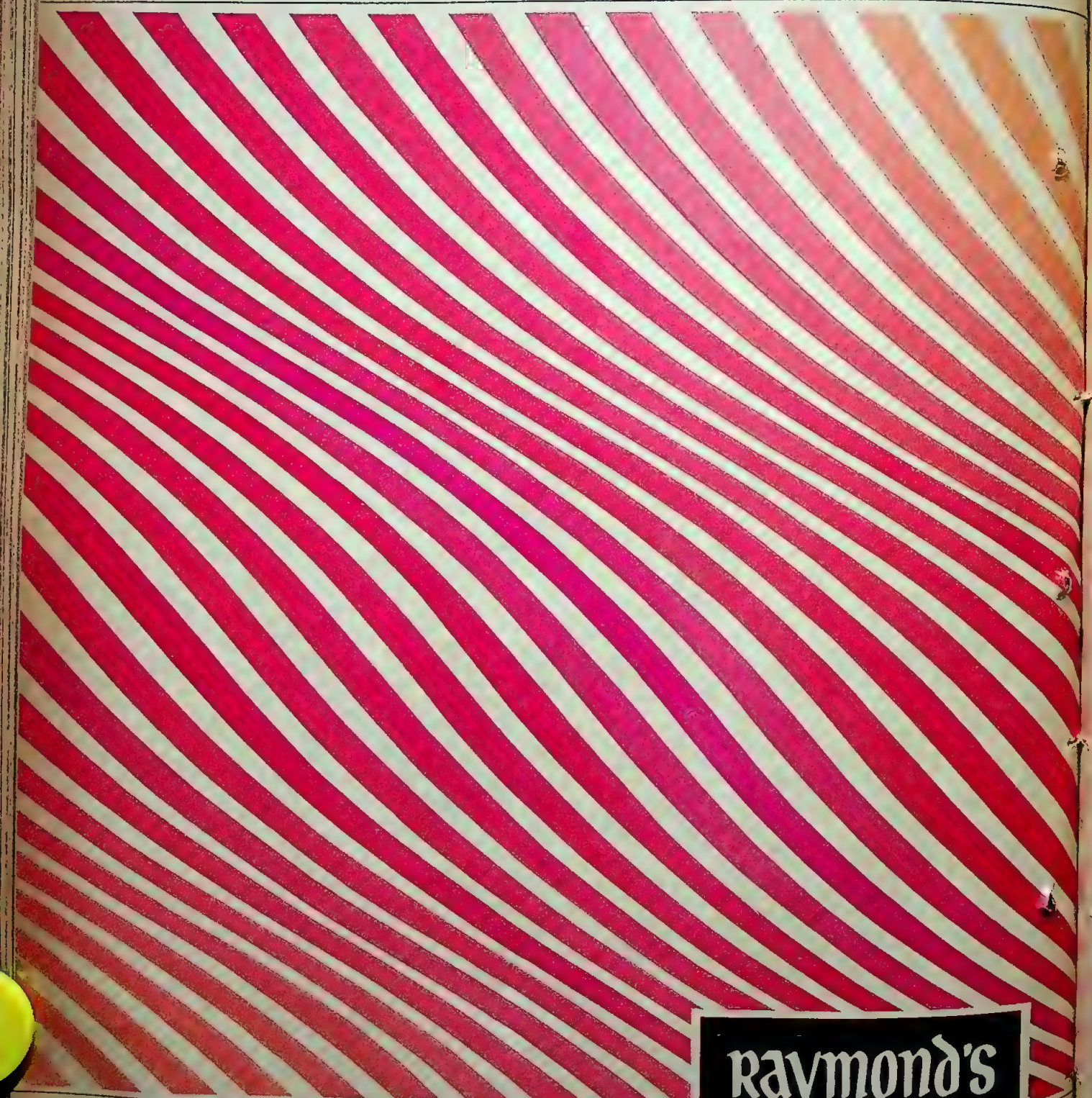
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the so-called loyalists in the state. Only last month he had a "cordial" chat with Gundu Rao when he came down to Bangalore to attend the Mahila Congress convention. But a revolt by senior Congress(I) leaders who are feeling neglected seems to be brewing. In a bid to prevent this the high command is now planning to appoint a high power coordination committee consisting of representatives of all the groups. But it is doubtful if at this late stage this would be of much help.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

KERALA

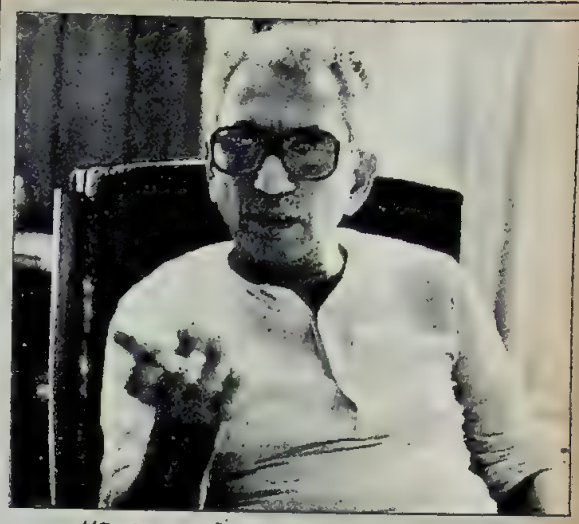
Holy Smoke



ASKING a communist to choose between Karl Marx and God is the height of heretical absurdity. But that is precisely the option that Kerala's quixotic Chief Minister Karunakaran has given the CPI(M)-led opposition in the state.In a rather unique ordinance promulgated last fortnight, the state Government has decided that only those who swear in the name of God and profess their faith in Him are eligible to vote or be a candidate in the coming elections to the Cochin and Travancore Devaswom boards.

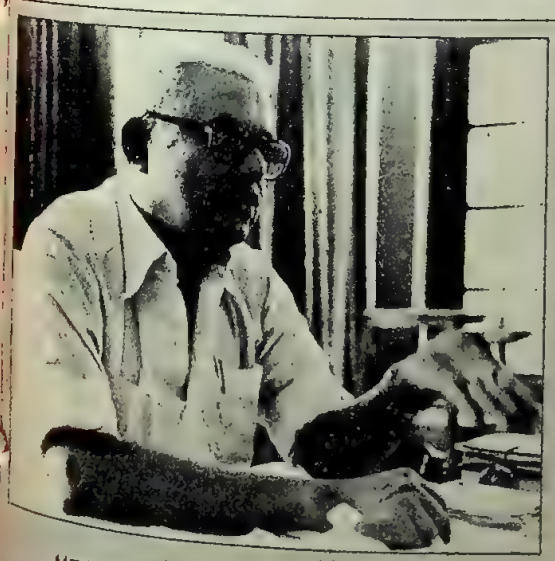
That the new ordinance is a clumsy piece of political chicanery is patently obvious. The voting for the elections is done by the Hindu MLA's in the Kerala Assembly. Since the ruling Congress(I)-led coalition has only 34 Hindu MLA's against 46 in the CPI(M)-led opposition, the outcome of the vote would not have been in doubt.But by sneaking in the new ordinance, the chief minister has decisively scuttled any chance the opposition candidates might have otherwise had.

The reaction from the Opposition was one of expected anger and disgust. Fumed E.K. Nayanar, former chief minister and leader of the Opposition in the Assembly: "This ordinance is absolutely unethical, unjustified and illegal and merely a ruse to block the election of an opposition candidate to the Devaswom board." The crafty Karunakaran, however, countered the accusation by stating: "Is it not better to entrust the administration of the temples to those who believe and who have faith in God?"



"Is it not better to entrust the administration of the temples to those who believe and who have faith in God?"

K. KARUNAKARAN



"This ordinance is absolutely unethical, unjustified and illegal and merely a ruse to block the election of an opposition candidate to the Devaswom board."

E.K. NAYANAR

In reality, the Devaswom issue has more to do with political than religious faith. The Marxists are as keen as anybody else to take control of the temple administration simply because of the massive funds involved. Temples like the famed Sabarimala temple have annual turnovers that amount to well over a crore and many also run lucrative schools and colleges. Recently, there was an unseemly dogfight among the ruling coalition parties for the prestigious post of president of the Travancore Devaswom board.

According to the current legislation the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom boards will have three members each. One is nominated by the Government, another by the Hindu ministers in the state cabinet and the third by the Hindu MLA's in the Assembly. The CPI(M) leaders say that their only interest was to ensure that a Harijan was elected as a member of the board. But K.P. Ramachandran Nair, the minister in charge of the Devaswoms claims that the latest ordinance was not politically motivated but issued on the basis of a recommendation by a one-man commission which examined temple administration. Nair says that the commission had suggested that only people who have faith in God should be allowed to look after Devaswom affairs.

But the ordinance issue has upset many Hindus as well. An organisation of religious scholars and heads of various Hindu organisations have come together to form the Hindu Munnani (Hindu Front) and have charged the state Government with trampling on the rights and freedom of the Hindus. The organisation plans to launch an agitation shortly against the ordinance which they see as a hollow attempt to politicise temple administration. In their view, administration should rest solely with religious practitioners of the faith as in the case of Christian churches and Muslim mosques.

Meanwhile, the two communist parties, the CPI(M) and the CPI along with the Revolutionary Socialist Party, are making ready to challenge the ordinance in court before the next assembly session starts in the last week of October. Faced with the combined wrath of the Opposition and the Hindu Front, Karunakaran may have just paved the way for Kerala's own October revolution.

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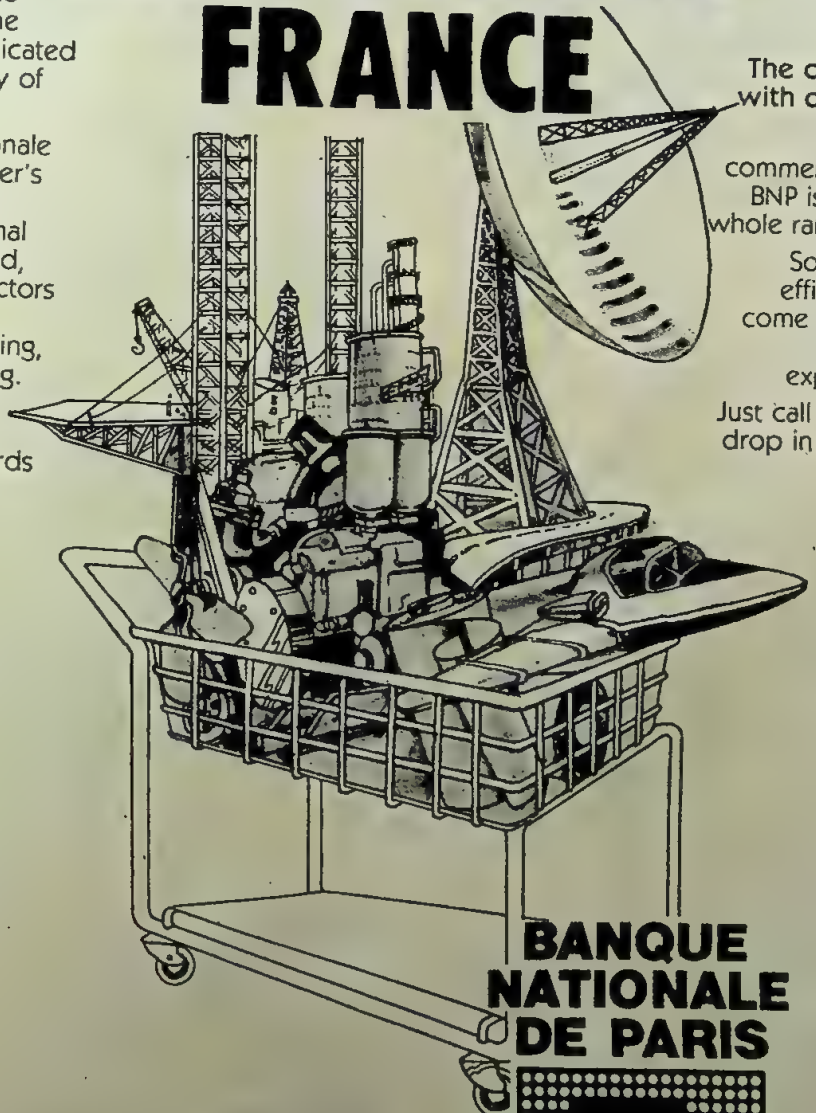
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RAJNEESHPURAM

The Saffron Scare

FOR THREE years, the people of Oregon have watched helplessly as the saffron-clad swamis of Rajneeshpuram began to establish a kingdom of their own in the state. But now the people, the press and the politicians have had enough. The last straw came when the followers of Bhagwan Rajneesh began busing thousands of Americans into Rajneeshpuram with the promise of free food, clothing and shelter for three months. In return, they are expected to register as voters—Oregon has very liberal registration laws—and vote anti-Rajneesh officials out of office in the November elections to the Wasco County Commission.

Fumes Oregon state representative Wayne Fawbush: "Any voting bloc which has more than 2,000-3,000 voters can tilt the results considerably—here we are talking of many more." The anger seems justified: when the Rajneeshis moved to Antelope in 1981, the first thing they did was to drive out its 35 non-Rajneeshi residents. The Rajneeshis, however, deny any such plan. "Fawbush is a fascist who has been harassing us," said Anand Sheela, president of the Rajneesh Foundation International, in a nationally telecast interview. "America is a free society, and here, everybody is free to do what they want—if my people want to vote, they will vote," she declared.

But just how far this freedom will be made to stretch is the question bothering people. Touting inanities like "freedom is to Rajneeshpuram what apple-pie is to Americans," the Rajneeshis built their own city, collected taxes and formed their own municipal court and police force. They now fill the entire school board in Antelope, have complete control of the city council, have changed street names, and imposed city taxes for the first time. Dozens of new buildings have been constructed in the last two years in what Rajneesh officials say is a $100 million investment now. And they claim that a lot of people have put their labour and worship into the place. Says a Rajneeshi: "Any bulldozer that goes in to dismantle the buildings will be painted with blood as it would first have to go over the bodies of the devotees."

For more than two years, investigators have been gathering what they say is evidence that prominent Rajneeshis committed felony by making false statements to immigration officers when they moved the religious empire from Pune in India to Oregon in 1981. Besides, two serious legal challenges already threaten the 1982 incorporation of Rajneeshpuram as an Oregon city with full municipal powers. One Oregon group has filed a suit saying the Rajneeshis built their city on land that was originally zoned for farming. Another suit alleges that Rajneeshpuram violates constitutional guarantees separating the church from the state.

Despite the open affection Rajneeshis show for each other, the leaders at the Mecca of spiritual sensuality are taking an increasingly hostile and militant stand against "enemy forces". And anybody investigating possible immigration violations by members and trying to limit the rapid growth of their communal city comes under that category. "If they touch one of my people, 15 of their heads will go," warns Anand Sheela. And that's no empty threat. The Rajneesh Peace Force has an undisclosed number of automatic weapons. Even though Rajneeshpuram has only 1,700 permanent residents, its police force outnumbers that of the county. At the week-long love-fest early this year, Rajneesh arrived in a white Rolls-Royce accompanied by a security helicopter and two machine-gun-toting Rajneeshpuram police officers. It is not uncommon to see photographs of Rajneesh driving by in one of his 40-odd Rolls-Royces, surrounded by armed guards. In fact, a large black ma-



Rajneesh (inset) and followers protesting in Portland: staying power

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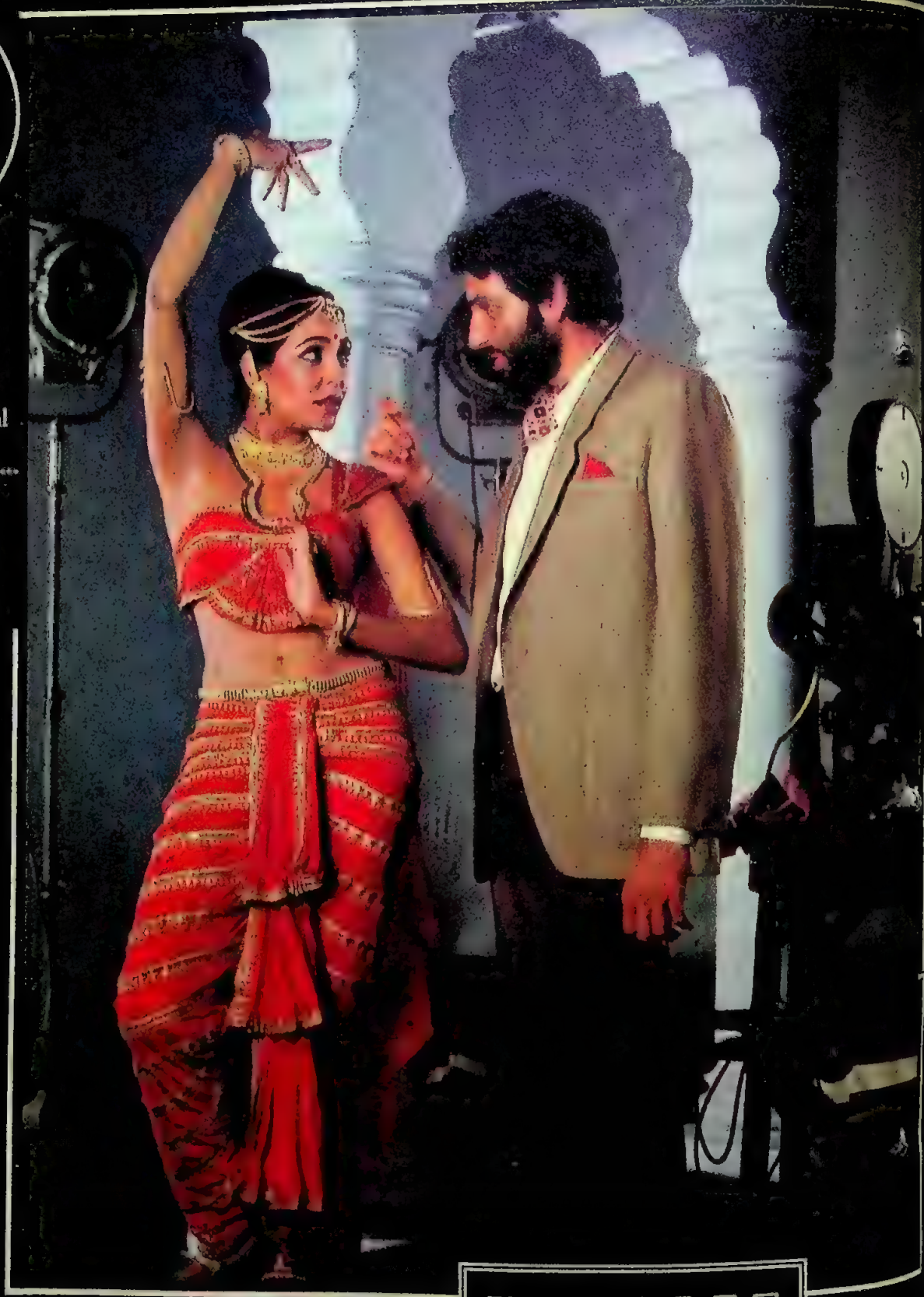
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DIGJAM

Unmistakably for the connoisseur.

chine-gun is now prominently displayed in the window of a vehicle which accompanies Rajneesh on his daily drive through Rancho Rajneesh, the 100 square mile ranch bought by the Rajneesh Investment Corporation in 1981. "If you have diamonds, you display them. The machine-gun looks good in the window—why not display it?" Anand Sheela is reported to have said.

While Rajneeshpuram arms itself against the outside world, the "spiritually awakened, environmentally sensitive and specially appointed community" within continues to function, propelled by its own beliefs. They continue to frolic in the Krishnamurti Lake, swing in the Rajneesh disco, play blackjack in the Rajneesh Casino or just sip iced cappucinos in Zorba the Buddha Lounge. They roam the streets of their new-found Utopia stopping often for long group hugs which have become characteristic of the city. "After all, they are providing me with a drug-free, violence-free society. If all I have to do in return is vote, I will do so willingly," says Cathy James, a Palo Alto resident who boarded a Rajneesh bus in San Francisco.

Outside, there is mounting evidence that the "Bhagwan buses" were sent out with the express intent of bringing voters into Rajneeshpuram. According to Dr Louisa Stark who works with the homeless in Arizona, those under 18 years of age, foreigners, ex-convicts and Indians were not allowed to get on to these buses. Early last week there were reports that some of these groups brought in to form voting blocs were disenchanted with life within the community and were being dumped all over the state. Public outcry gained new momentum with demands for official intervention. Government investigators are concerned about how the Rajneeshpuram police and the larger community security force would react if they called for a thorough investigation.

The Rajneeshis, however, continue to appear on prime-time television interviews and major news stories alleging that they are being discriminated against. "They crucified Jesus, they poisoned Socrates and now they are after Bhagwan. By the year 2000, only Rajneeshpuram will suruive," they cry unanimously. In a statement to the community's Third Annual World Celebration Anand Sheela said: "As far as our community is concerned we are determined to protest and to protect our truth and our freedom with the very last drop of blood." Judging by their present mood, there is little reason to doubt her rhetoric.

—CHITRA SUBRAMANIAM in San Francisco.

SWITZERLAND

Rajiv Comes Calling

THE STRONG and sweet allure of a Krishna of the Hindi screen"—that was how a leading Swiss newspaper described Rajiv Gandhi during a whirlwind two-day visit to Geneva last month. The newspaper, the *Tribune de Geneve*, went on to say: "Surprisingly, in a face imprinted with mildness is the intense look of the mother—something implacable under a silken outer layer."

Obviously, Rajiv had made an impact in Geneva, but the more enduring reaction to the visit is one that may not be what he had intended. For, the talk in the Geneva press is not so much how well he conducted himself at his public functions but about the public relations outfit, Hill and Knowlton, that arranged his press conference, the links of that outfit with the Gandhi family, and its alleged interest in promoting that family's and India's image in countries abroad.

The Observer of London was the first off the mark. In an item the Sunday after Rajiv's visit it said that Rajiv was hoping to polish up the family image with Hill and Knowlton's help and had discussed plans with the concern in Geneva. More interestingly, it quoted a Hill and Knowlton executive to say that Rajiv's link with the firm was his wife Sonia. "She is a friend of our European president, who is also Italian," the newspaper quoted the executive as saying. The executive shot off a letter to the paper protesting that he had been misquoted. And, Hill and Knowlton chief executive in Geneva, Dorio Mutti who is indeed Italian, called INDIA TODAY in New Delhi to say that while he had met Sonia and Rajiv, he could hardly claim friendship as *The Observer* had proclaimed in their story, with either of them.

Friendship with Sonia Gandhi, however desirable in the circumstances, is hardly the stuff of news reports, but it all came to a boil because repeated contradictory statements about the press conference led reporters to smell a rat. Rajiv's visit centered on a three-hour seminar organised by the European Management Forum (EMF), the Swiss government-backed agency which organises among other things the annual Davos symposium of leading businessmen and invited politicians. Hill and Knowlton had obviously gone out of their way to organise a press luncheon—some

Rajiv at Geneva: mixed reactions





60 mostly western correspondents attended—and earned the wrath of some Indian reporters by not inviting them to it. Mutti says that his idea was to expose Rajiv to the western press and that a couple of Indians were invited. But Chakravarti Raghavan of the Rome-based Inter Press Service said: "I was invited and then disinvited." He was told this had been done after consultations with Rajiv's aides.

But the question of who had organised and paid for the press lunch remained. Mutti explained that the press conference was organised at Hill and Knowlton's own initiative as a service to the Geneva press corps with whom they have extensive dealings. This, Mutti said, was normal practice, and the firm did it routinely for visiting dignitaries. But in a separate statement last week European Management Forum (EMF) President Klaus Schwab said: "The EMF foundation invited Rajiv Gandhi for a special meeting here in Geneva and this invitation was accepted. In view of the importance of the meeting, the EMF foundation wanted to give the opportunity to the press to meet with Rajiv Gandhi. The EMF asked Dorio Mutti to organise the press conference as a gesture toward the EMF and in view of future possible cooperation on other projects of the EMF." Referring to reports that have surfaced from time to time, Mutti said his firm was not retained by the Indian Government or the Congress party or by anyone to project the Gandhi family or India's image abroad. But it is obviously interested in business with India: denying *The Observer* report, Mutti said: "I wish I could say that it was true, I wish we were working in India."

> **"This kind of access to the prime minister's office is priceless," said one banker. "What we expect is that when we visit India these top officials will receive us."**

Whatever the truth, Rajiv's press conference was marked by some tough questioning on current Indian problems particularly on the dismissal of the N. T. Rama Rao ministry in Andhra Pradesh. While his advisors had hoped the questions would be more about India's business and economic issues, which was the subject of Rajiv's talk to the EMF, the press was more interested in political questions, and though Rajiv proved to be lucid and sharp, there was some murmuring among his advisors that it ought to have taken a different direction.

Despite the fracas about the press conference and the generally bemused comments in the local press, Rajiv did manage to put across the sincerity and thoughtfulness which characterises his public appearances abroad. His 45-minute address on "Social, Political and Economic Perspectives of India" publicised India as a stable political entity, nearly 80 per cent of whose national income comes from private enterprise. He noted that less than 6 per cent of India's planned expenditure of US $30 billion in 1984-85 will come from external assistance, and he drove home points about increasing food and petroleum self-sufficiency and the considerable gains in health, life expectancy and literacy that the country has experienced.

"India's political system is strong enough and resilient enough, and the Indian leadership is mature enough to withstand the stresses and strains of our transition to a new social and economic order," said Rajiv. "The question today is not whether we are moving in the right direction but how fast we can move."

EMF had assembled a small group of businessmen to hear Rajiv, but none of them was senior enough to merit the personal attention of the first general secretary of India's ruling party and heir apparent to India's prime minister. EMF is an expensive consultancy firm helping businessmen to make contact with government and political figures, and it routinely organises such seminars with leading political figures, including heads of government and ministers. For instance, Narain Dutt Tiwari attended the last Davos symposium when he was industry minister.

Understandably, most of the fee-paying seminar participants last month were delighted with Rajiv's presence and felt that they had got an inside track to the Indian Government. "This kind of access to the prime minister's office is priceless," said one banker who asked not to be identified. Asked what he thought Rajiv or India might have gained from the encounter, he said: "Frankly, I think Mr Gandhi wasted his time. Those of us who want to do business with India go there directly. Asking questions of top level Indian visitors to Geneva might massage our egos but that is about all. What we expect is that when we visit India these top officials will receive us. That is why we pay the Forum."

—BRIJ KINDHARIA and CHITRA SUBRAMANIAM in Geneva



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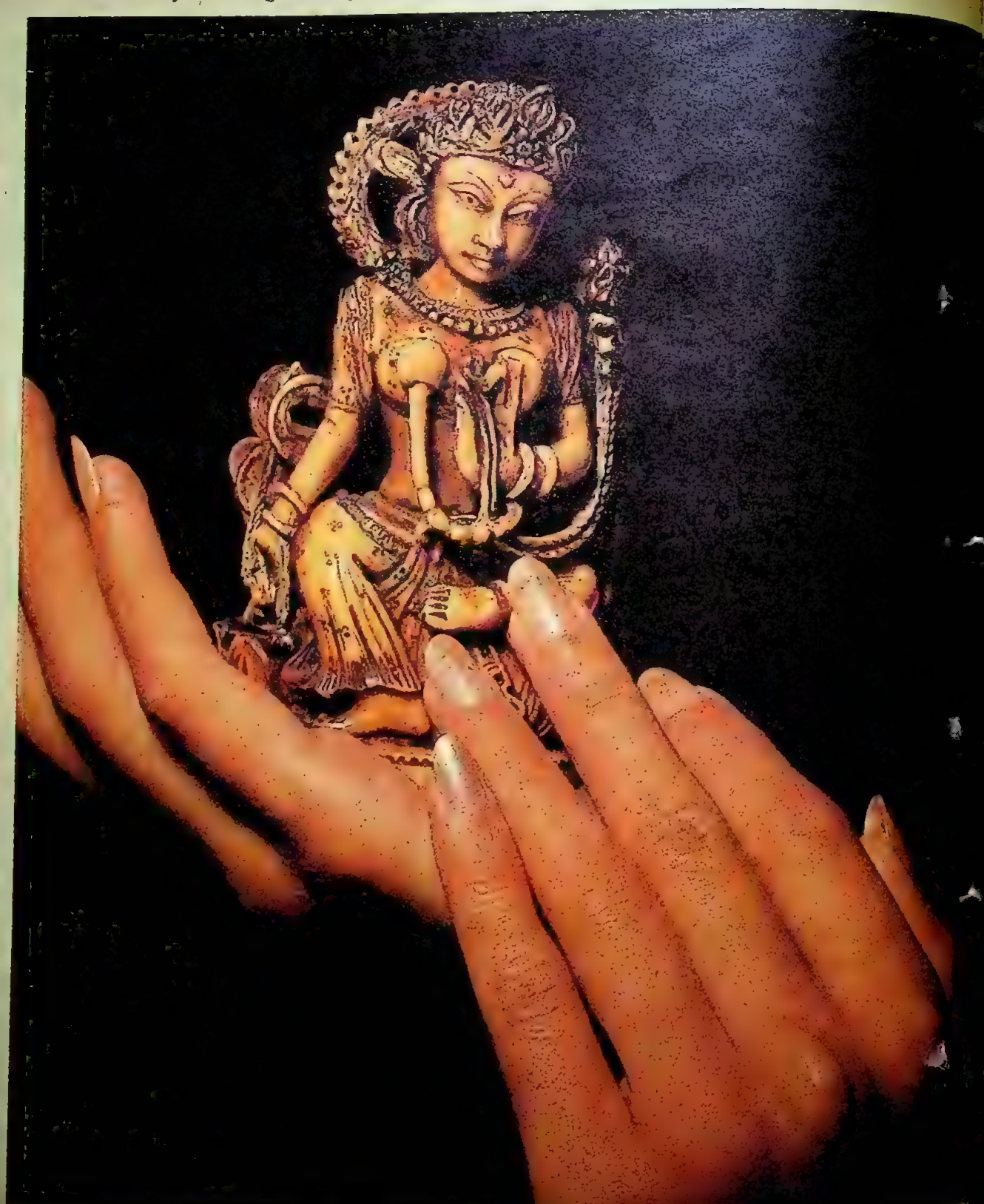
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SRI LANKA

Lack of Consensus



THE SCALE of violence in the north and east of the island state of Sri Lanka is markedly smaller now than in August. But this could well be a specious calm. "The terrorists are biding their time," says National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali. "They are looking for new targets—an army camp perhaps, and economic targets in the south." This is certainly the Government's reading of the situation, because Finance Minister Ronnie De Mel has increasingly been speaking of a "defence-oriented" budget.

At the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly in September, Sri Lanka Foreign Minister A.C. Shahul Hameed took up the question of "terrorism" and the use of "foreign territory" by terrorist groups. Though Hameed did not mention names, Ram Niwas Mirdha, the Indian minister of state for external affairs, reiterated India's known position of non-interference in its neighbour's affairs. In fact, at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in the Isle of Man early October, a conciliatory Lok Sabha Speaker, Balram Jakhar, made a formal apology over remarks about Sri Lanka Tamils made by a delegate from south India. However, western diplomats have observed that Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has changed ground from India's concern over "Tamil refugees" to a question of "human rights" that should be the concern of the international community as well.

But in Sri Lanka itself, there is little progress on the "solution" to the vexed problem of the Tamils. In an admirably terse statement, President Junius Richard Jayewardene defined the complexities of the negotiating process as the seemingly intractable problem of reconciling the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) view of regional councils and nothing less, and the Sinhala position of "district councils and nothing more". But on November 15, he will place before the All-Party Conference a draft legislation on elected district councils, inter-district coordinating units and a new chamber which would allow special representation for minority groups. From the second chamber, the President would pick "chief ministers" for the inter-district coordinating units. The upper house could also have "select committees" to monitor fundamental rights and inquire into questions like educational opportunities, language rights, land distributions to settler-colonists and employment—all familiar sources of Tamil resentment.

YUITHA YAPA ASSOCIATES



All-Party Conference: absenteeism

The term "inter-district coordinating units" attempt to avoid any stricter geographic definition like "provincial councils'. The Northern Province has five districts, and presumably these could coordinate activities, but any idea of "one Tamil linguistic unit" (the TULF's hope of inter-provincial north-east coordination) has been rejected. In any case, the powers and functions of the proposed councils have yet to be defined. Consequently, many Tamil opinion-makers in Colombo find the proposals "insubstantial and ill-defined".

The TULF has yet to issue a formal statement on the proposals but a disappointed A. Amirthalingam, party secretary-general, was reported in the foreign press as having called it "an exercise in futility". The Government's sensitivity to any public debate on the package, especially to any polemics by the hardline Buddhist clergy, is understandable, because the emergency regulations, including censorship, have been withdrawn on account of the by-elections being held this month.

Despite all that the President might say about a "consensus" for his proposals, it was clear at the All-Party Conference which concluded on September 30 that strictly speaking, there wasn't even a Sinhala consensus. This was simply because a large number of parties were not present at the meeting. The most conspicuous absentee was former premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). A party delegation had accepted a presidential invitation and discussed Jayewardene's "consensus report" presented to the conference on September 21, but it refused to participate unless its leader's civic rights were restored.

A surprise visit to Bandaranaike's Colombo home by Justice Minister Nissanka Wijeyeratne had stirred mild speculations on the Government's overtures to its most vocal critic. A new journal, *Forum*, with which her daughter Sunethra is closely associated, gave an authoritative and so far uncontradicted account of the meeting. Evidently the minister, with the Government's knowledge, had offered Bandaranaike a "conditional pardon", the condition being participation in the talks. According to the *Forum*, Bandaranaike refused to accept a pardon with strings attached.

Another notable absentee was the island's newest party, the Sri Lanka People's Party (SLMP). This new party is led by Bandaranaike's former deputy, T.B. Ilangaratne together with her film star son-in-law and daughter, Vijaya and Chandrika Kumaratunge.

Yet another absentee was the Communist Party, which had involved itself in the talks up to the last session. It has one MP in the national Parliament. The left-inclined but more Sinhala nationalist Mahajana Eksath Perumuna (people's united front) whose leader Dinesh Gunawardene is an MP, was also absent.

What such conspicuous absenteeism means is that in fact the September 30 conference found it exceedingly difficult to mobilise even a genuine "Sinhala consensus" which, everybody agrees, is a prerequisite for the negotiated settlement of the Tamil problem. And whether Jayewardene can achieve more in November at the next session of the All-Party Conference than he did in September remains to be seen.

—MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

SANTHALS

The Branded Witches

THE SANTHAL villages scattered among the gently wooded hills of south Purulia in West Bengal have changed little over the years. But today, behind their placid facade, trouble is brewing. This was apparent last fortnight when the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Jyoti Basu demanding an immediate ban on 'witch-hunting' in these villages and the arrest of all those connected with it. Adding fuel to the fire was the PUCL allegation that local CPI(M) leaders had resorted to murder and intimidation to thwart attempts by reformers to put an end to the barbarous practice.

The memorandum was prompted by a series of attacks on a group of Santhals who have been in the vanguard of the drive against witch-hunting and other inhuman and degrading tribal customs. Whether the Government takes the memorandum seriously or not, the consequences for these reformers are serious indeed. They have challenged the authority of tribal orthodoxy and worse, betrayed the secrecy of tribal institutions. For this they can expect retribution. Fumes Sudhir Besra of Raina village, echoing the sentiments of most tribals: "We have our own beliefs, customs and laws, according to which we make our own judgements. Nobody has the right to interfere."

The reformists, however, think otherwise. "We Santhals have some primitive practices which are used to exploit the vulnerable in our society," says Mahadev Hansda of Kaira village. Hansda, a schoolteacher, edits the Santhali magazine *Tetre* which preaches reform to its 1,200-odd subscribers throughout the district. He and a group of like-minded Santhals have been battling since 1976 against what they consider the most depraved of their community's customs: witch-hunting. Most Santhals still believe that when a witch casts an evil eye at her victim, incurable illness and misfortune are the result.

But the real victim is more often the poor woman branded as a witch. For the unfortunate person so pronounced by the *sokha* (witch-doctor) is put on trial by the village council and fined any amount from Rs 500 to Rs 5,000. If she refuses to or is unable to pay the fine the 'witch' is often beaten or stoned to death. Ajit Hansda, a youth who ekes out a living at the Jhilimili tourist resort recalls with bitterness: "My mother was declared a witch when a boy fell ill and started shouting that a witch was eating his insides. Nobody in the village spoke for us, although they knew we were too poor to pay any fine. One night when the villagers were drunk they came to our house and beat my mother with lathis. She died in hospital at Bankura the next day."

It is usually widows and other such vulnerable women who are declared witches and the purpose, apart from the release of pent-up aggression, seems to be material exploitation. The experience of Purnima Mandi, wife of a well-to-do cultivator, is a case in point. Says her son Lakhinder: "My mother would be declared a witch every time someone in our village fell ill". Her husband was driven to the brink of ruin by the many fines he had to pay, which served only to pay for the drinking bouts of the other villagers. Only a year-and-a-half later when the matter was reported to the authorities by one of the reformists did the villagers, scared by the involvement of the authorities, stop daring to declare her a witch.

Cruel though the custom may seem, most Santhals support it. Perhaps this is because everyone in the village—apart from the victim—benefits from the fines levied. A large share of these fines goes to the village chiefs, but the biggest beneficiaries of all are those who masquerade as



It is usually widows and other such vulnerable women who are declared witches.

PANMONIHANSDA,
declared a witch



"We Santhals have some primitive practices which are used to exploit the vulnerable in our society."

MAHADEV HANSDA,
editor of the reformist magazine Tetre



"Nobody knows who the witch is but we have the power to identify her."

MANDI,
a professed 'witch-doctor'

witch-doctors and profess the esoteric ability to recognise witches. They charge anywhere from Rs 250 to Rs 2,000 for their services. Asserts one of them, Mandi: "Nobody knows who the witch is but we have the power to identify her."

The village chiefs, most of whom support witch-hunting, used to be elected annually. But they have now with the help of political parties been made hereditary chieftains. "The chiefs are manipulated for votes by political parties," says Baliswar Soren, a reformist from Jamtoria village. And it stands to reason that no party, including the CPI(M) has any intention of disturbing a custom which has the sanction of the majority.

There is little the police can do. Says a police official of the area: "We often hear of witches being killed by villagers but there is nothing we can do about it." Most cases are not reported to the police and even if they are convictions are almost impossible to obtain because Santhals rarely come forward to testify in court. The involvement of political parties only complicates the matter, and it was in answer to this that the reform movement was formed a little over a decade ago by a group of a dozen educated Santhals.

"Although many Santhals shunned us, many educated Santhals liked our ideas, and our songs and plays, and they too found the practice of torturing defenceless women revolting," says Mahadev Hansda. Panchanan Soren of Basantpur village agrees that "in the villages where anti-witch-hunting associations are strong, nobody is branded a witch." The killings of witches too have declined dramatically in the area—from five last year to none this year.

The counter-attack against the reformist thrust is being supported by the leaders of the most powerful political party in the area: the CPI(M). The battle flared up in March this year when a Santhal of Bardohi village, Chandrakar Tudu, unable to stomach the humiliating trial of a 'witch', Chunni Tudu, burst out that the trial was a farce and that he did not believe in witches. "I was heckled and then beaten up," says Chandrakar, who does not dare to venture out of his house unarmed any more. On the day of Chunni's trial, some Santhals also dragged her uncle Shital Hembramb, an ex-Congress(I) MLA from her house and thrashed him mercilessly.

When the police arrested Lariram Tudu, chief of Bardohi village, the supposed victim of Chunni's evil eye and one Sarju who had branded Chunni a witch, the police outpost was besieged by a mob of 200 Santhals demanding their release. Simultaneously many Santhal leaders, including CPI(M) members, gave a call for the trial of Shital Hembramb and Chunni's husband Sudhir Tudu. The situation was only defused by the posting of a police picket in the area. Chandrakar Tudu, like most others asked in the area, points at CPI(M) leader and ex-anchal pradhan of Chotoranga village Ramdas Baskey as the leader of the attack on the reformists.

BHASKEY, along with other Santhal and Jharkhand Party leaders has organised several meetings and exhorted the tribals to resist and punish the activities of the reformists. Alleges Chunaram Besra, CPI(M) member of the gram panchayat of Raina village: "The reformists are politically motivated and Congress(I) people, such as Shital Hembramb, are trying to take advantage of the situation by attacking our social customs." Like most Santhals, Besra too believes that the social problems of Santhals should be dealt with at "special trials held by Santhals."

That the confrontation could only get worse was brought home by the attempted murder of Sudhir Tudu on June 23. "The attackers had dragged out the women from Tudu's house and were beating them in the dark," says Saroda Prasad Kisku, one of Mahadev Hansda's colleagues, "and in the confusion they mistook Lakhan Tudu for Sudhir and murdered him." Tudu's house was attacked thrice the same day, prompting him and his family of 'non-believers' to flee the village.



"By supporting witch-hunting the CPI(M) is making inroads into villages where it had little clout."

SARODA PRASAD KISKU,
a leader of the reformists

Afterwards there were several attacks not only on Kisku but Mahadev Hansda, Baliswar Soren and other reformists in different villages, necessitating the posting of an armed police contingent at Bardohi till September 18.

The reformists, for their part, realise they cannot live under the protection of the police forever. Maheswar Besra, secretary of the reformist association at Jamtoria, has been assaulted twice for his views and has little faith in the police. "I know the persons who assaulted me—one of them was Chunaram Besra, the panchayat member—but all of them are still moving about freely," he says. Moreover, the murder of Jagoren Soren, a Congress(I)-affiliated schoolteacher and highly regarded local leader of Basantpur has convinced many, like schoolteacher Haripada Hansda, that "the CPI(M) will do anything to further its political influence in the area".

By supporting the custom of witch-hunting, says Saroda Prasad Kisku, the CPI(M) is making rapid inroads into villages like Bardohi where it previously had little clout. The reformists have decided to continue their crusade regardless of the consequences. "With a little support from the state Government we could have rendered all witch-doctors jobless overnight," says Mahadev Hansda, "but now I suppose it will take a little longer." Once again, short-sighted politicians look set to scuttle a much-needed attempt at reform.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Purulia

RAM JANMBHUMI

Conflicting Claims

AYODHYA, the birthplace of Lord Rama and the holiest of holies for the Hindus, has been the site of at least 76 holy wars over the past 500 years. Last week, it became the rallying point for the start of yet another battle threatening to pour fuel on communal fire.

On October 7, the much-publicised 'liberation march' from Sitamarhi in Bihar to Lucknow organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, reached Ayodhya where a mass oath-taking ceremony was scheduled.The purpose behind the march is to 'liberate' the disputed shrine called Babri Masjid which the Hindus believe to be the birthplace of Lord Rama.The organisers have also pledged to liberate two other shrines, the one in Mathura where Mughal ruler Aurangzeb had constructed an 'Idgah' over the spot where Lord Krishna was born, and the Vishwanath Temple at Kashi which has also been turned into a mosque.

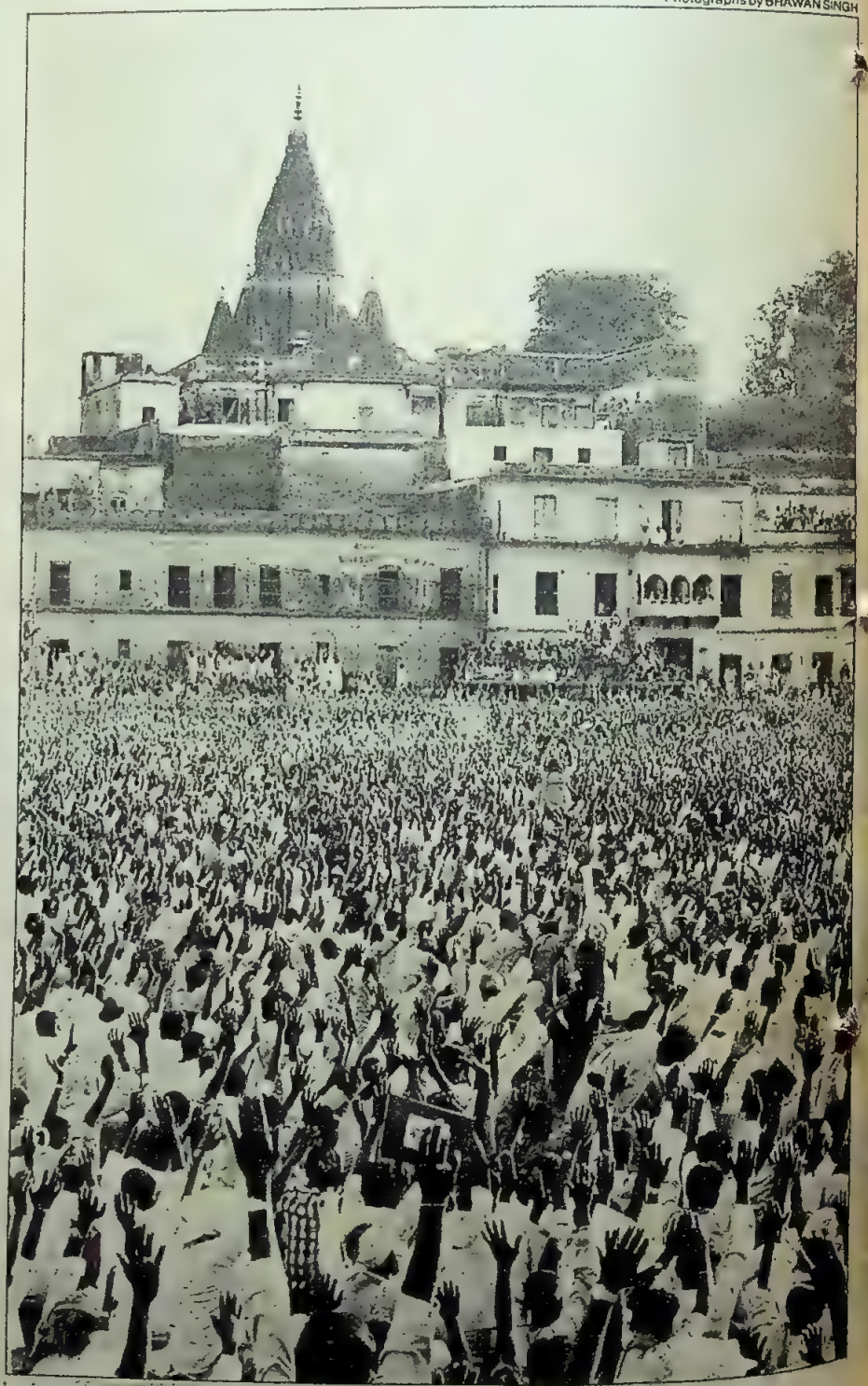
What makes the exercise assume frightening proportions is the rabid communalism behind the intentions as well as the strong political influence the entire affair has attracted. At the Ayodhya ceremony on the banks of the river Saryu, the speakers' dais was dominated by a huge hoarding showing armed Hindus and Muslims facing each other in confrontation. An estimated 60,000 devotees gathered at Ayodhya took a solemn oath to make every sacrifice to liberate the Sri Ram Janmbhumi. On the dais one of the speakers declared: "Whosoever helps in the liberation of this and the other two sacred places will get the Hindu votes in the coming elections", leaving nobody in doubt that the volatile mixture of politics and communalism had cast its sinister shadow across the gathering.

But the meeting was certainly not as Parishad General Secretary, Harmohan Lal, claimed, "Symbolic of the faith and sentiments of 60 crore Hindus." Many local people and even Hindu priests stayed away from the ceremony precisely because of the political overtones. Only a dozen people from the original 'Dharm Yatra' were present.One of the most important Mahants, Swami Sitaram Sharan, flatly stated in an interview:"Politics has entered the Mukti (movement)."

Leaders of the Sri Ram Janmbhumi Mukti Yajna Samiti, an offshoot of the Parishad, deny that politics has any part to play in their efforts to reclaim their religious shrines.The organisation's general secretary, Dau Dayal Khanna, a former Congress minister and legislator, denied that the movement had been launched on the eve of the elections to garner the Hindu vote."I merely placed a resolution to liberate the holy places and the Parishad adopted it.There is no scope for politics," he said.

Khanna himself is a member of the Congress(I) and though Muslim leaders suspect a Congress(I) hand behind the show, overtly, the BJP seems to be the

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH



The Ayodhya mass oath-taking ceremony

spearhead.Uttar Pradesh BJP President, Kalyan Singh, on the eve of the oath-taking ceremony declared his support for the movement and called upon the Muslims not to be misguided by fanaticism. At the ceremony itself, BJP leaders were predominant and included, apart from Singh, party treasurer Surya Krishna and Rajendra Kumar, deputy leader of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) besides at least 50 other office-bearers of the party.

But the political element, according to locals, has always been part of the age-old controversy and has decided the fate of quite a few Hindu candidates in previous elections. Parishad leaders trace the history of the conflict to the year 1 BC when Vikramaditya is believed to have built a temple at the place where Rama had 'appeared' on the banks of the Saryu. In 1528, the Mughal emperor Babar destroyed the temple and built a mosque in its place. Since then, the battle of Ayodhya has been raging more or less unabated through the centuries.

Confrontationist hoarding on the dais (top) and the disputed shrine at Ayodhya





IT TOOK on a contemporary flavour in 1949 when an idol of Rama appeared mysteriously in the mosque. A group of devotees then captured the mosque and started regular prayers. The Muslims filed a case against the occupation following which the city magistrate attached the disputed shrine and appointed a receiver. Under the order, the spot where the idol had appeared was sealed off with iron bars.

A year later, a case was filed in the court of the civil judge asking for removal of the receiver and the handing over of the shrine to the Hindus. Since then at least five other cases have been filed and are still pending in various high courts but nobody can actually recall when the last hearings were held. For all practical purposes, the mosque continues to be in the control of the Hindus.

Last fortnight's liberation march has only succeeded in resurrecting the entire controversy. Mohammad Hashim Ansari, vice president of the Anjuman Muhafiz-e-Maqabir Avadh-Ayodhya, the organisation that has been fighting the cases involving the three disputed shrines for over three decades, has suggested that a special judge be appointed and both sides sit together to settle the matter by producing evidence. Ansari hopes that this will put an end to the controversy once and for all. However district officials say that since the matter is pending in the courts, they are helpless and the matter will continue to be debated.

The latest attempt to regain control of the disputed shrines was more in the nature of a show of force. The administration, fearing violence, was forced to deploy three companies of paramilitary forces to maintain order.

Though there were no untoward incidents, some of the speeches and slogans raised were inflammatory. At the start of the Dharm Yatra, a section of Hindu youths had started chanting: *'Bharat me rahna ho to Vandemataram kahana hoga'* (If anybody wants to live in India, he has to say Vandemataram). Against that background, it is not surprising that many people, including those taking part in the ceremony, feel that the war of liberation has reached a dangerously climactic stage.

—FARZAND AHMED in Ayodhya

UTTAR PRADESH

Wooing the Electorate

THE POLITICAL traffic was more like a swarm of bees around a garden of flowers than a gaggle of politicians at their usual, tired chore of holding public meetings handing out pious homilies to blasé audiences. The Congress (I)'s number two man, Rajiv Gandhi, MP from Amethi, was there with his managerial and political entourage in tow. In what looked like an election campaign, he toured Amethi in a cavalcade of 10 new jeeps and about 100 Delhi University volunteers. He inaugurated a school, completed three padyatras and addressed a dozen audiences. Cousin Arun Nehru, MP from neighbouring Rae Bareli and another Congress (I) heavyweight, was there holding never-ending closed door consultations. The Opposition had arrived in strength. The Janata Party's Chandra Shekhar and George Fernandes kicked up dust as they scoured the countryside in search of support. So did the Lok Dal's taciturn Charan Singh and the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch's (RSM) ebullient young leader Menaka Gandhi.

Last fortnight, gargantuan Uttar Pradesh (population: 119 million; Lok Sabha seats: 85) was the focus of an unprecedented amount of attention from the country's netas. And although the next Lok Sabha elections have yet to be announced, these comings and goings in the country's largest state signified that the battle was already joined. All the trappings of electioneering were there: posters going up at the crossroads of towns, graffiti snaking its way across rural walls, and a general rise in the political temperature in party offices, in coffee-houses, in tea stalls.

And no wonder. At stake is not just the 85 seats of Uttar Pradesh, and such prestige contests as Amethi where Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's son will battle her daughter-in-law. The state is seen to be a barometer of the mood in northern India, the largest, most typical, most unpredictable, and most keenly fought state in the



vast Hindi heartland which stretches from Pakistan's border in the west to West Bengal, the high hills of Himachal Pradesh to the rocky border of Andhra Pradesh. Conventional wisdom is that Mrs Indira Gandhi's party, which had won 351 seats in the 1980 Lok Sabha elections but is fighting a back-to-the-wall battle to gain a simple majority in the next election, has lost control of the once invincible south. Its battlefield is now in the north where its fate will be sealed. Said one Congress (I) functionary in Lucknow: "Each and every seat in Uttar Pradesh is crucial for us. If we lose any of the 51 seats, it will reduce the party's chances of returning to power."

Understandably, then, the Congress(I) has been quick off the mark in the wooing of Uttar Pradesh. But its battle for the state didn't start last fortnight. It dates to the appointment of Narain Dutt Tiwari as chief minister on August 31, '84. At the same time, former chief minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh was brought into harness as the state's party chief, to give the party two strong men with ample administrative experience, a clean image and public goodwill in order to spearhead the party's fight for supremacy.

THE SHUFFLE at the top was necessary if Uttar Pradesh was to fend off the fate that befell Andhra Pradesh which was lost to the Congress(I) in the 1983 Assembly elections, a victim of misguided central interference. Even at the pinnacle of the Congress(I)'s popularity in 1980, the party was able to win only 51 seats compared to its peak of 81 in 1952. It yielded 29 seats to the Lok Dal and another three to the Janata Party which were otherwise humiliated in the 1980 poll. The fragility of the party's position in the state is underlined by the fact that it won only 35.94 per cent of the popular vote in the 1980 election, the lowest since 1967 barring the 1977 debacle. In comparison, the Lok Dal and the Janata won 51.24 per cent and would have bested the Congress(I) as they did in 1977 had they not fallen at each other's throats. Since then, the Congress-(I)'s position hasn't improved much: in the Assembly poll in 1980 it took 37.78 per cent of the votes cast.

The numbers don't, of course, tell the whole story. In the last four years, the state has had no fewer than three chief ministers and the party unit no less than eight presidents. Maladministration, ineffective leadership and severe infighting cost the state heavily in popular support, and it was clear that if the party didn't switch tracks soon, it would be on a one-way ticket to oblivion.

It was this belated realisation that led Mrs Gandhi to depute her two stalwarts to Uttar Pradesh. While Singh was charged

BHAWAN SINGH



Tiwari and Singh: sops for the voter

with the task of shaking up the lethargic leviathan that passes for party organisation, Tiwari was to make up for time lost in the administration.

The two got off the mark quickly. For Tiwari, who is trying to live down his Sanjay Gandhi image which earned him the sobriquet, New Delhi Tiwari, because he was ever prepared to hop over to the capital to consult with his Emergency-period mentor, the day begins and ends with government files. His lodestar is: decisions. Unlike other ministers, chief or Union, when he is not on the road, Tiwari is buried in files 16 hours a day at his teak-panelled office in the Vidhan Sabha annexe. In a country where functionaries are better known to pass the buck, simply shelve files or pretend that decisions don't have to be made, Tiwari's supporters point out with pride that he actually does what a chief minister is supposed to do: he takes an average of 20 major decisions a day. In the last two months, the statistically minded of his staff point out that he has passed no fewer than 6,000 orders, presided over at least a dozen cabinet meetings,

RURAL MOOD

Caste Concerns

For a state as large and diverse as Uttar Pradesh, it is hardly surprising that there exists a distinct cleavage between the eastern part of the state and the western. Each has its own identity and peculiarities which offer some indication of the factors that may influence voting patterns in the coming elections. To examine the factors and their importance, Principal Correspondent PRABHU CHAWLA *toured the east while Correspondent* SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *paralleled his efforts in the west. Their report:*

THE OLD Maoist adage that power flows from the barrel of a gun is nowhere better illustrated than in eastern Uttar Pradesh. That situation, however, comes as no great surprise, considering the large-scale presence of people with criminal backgrounds in almost every political party—every fifth MLA or MLC and every fifth Zilla Parishad member faces criminal charges. Consequently, the over one crore voters in what is the most backward part of the state are constantly haunted by fear. Says Sushil Paul, a leading Allahabad High Court advocate settled in Basti district: "Neither the oratory nor the good conduct of politicians will decide the future of a political party. The outcome of the elections will be decided purely on the basis of the number of guns or goons owned by a candidate or his supporter."

The truth of his statement is in evidence in the entire eastern belt from Faizabad to Sultanpur. Says Ram Chandra Prashad, president of the Gorakhpur District Bar Association: "People don't vote for issues. People have lost faith in the Government because it can't protect them and the criminals and their leaders can."

Gangs roam freely across the countryside, terrorising rival candidates and threatening voters with impunity. Last month, Virendra Pratap Shahi, a Rashtriya Sanjay Manch MLA at the head of a 40-member armed gang, had launched a campaign to counter the terror tactics of Hari Shankar Tiwari, a Congress(I) supported leader of yet another 60-member armed group in Gorakhpur. Earlier, over 1,000 residents of Nautanwa on the Indo-Nepal border had refused to conduct an important religious ceremony in protest against the delay in arresting Tiwari's son who was one of the accused in the murder of Ajit Singh, a local building contractor. None of the other political parties backed the protest. Shahi, who took up the cause, is himself facing half a dozen murder charges. Says he: "People voted for me in this area because they know I will protect them. They have been living under a constant threat of criminals."



"People voted for me in this area because they know I will protect them. They have been living under a constant threat of criminals."

VIRENDRA PRATAP SHAHI
RSM MLA



"In Uttar Pradesh there is no equality. The Brahmin is the one most favoured by the Government. The Jat comes last."

HARBIR SINGH
farmer

Shahi also represents the growing inter-caste conflict in this poverty-stricken region. He is regarded as the champion of the Thakurs who own 17 per cent of the land but comprise 8 per cent of the population of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Tiwari is regarded as the leader of the Brahmins who own a slightly larger percentage of the land. Both castes have been involved in wooing lower caste Harijans and the poorer urban voters on behalf of the parties they represent. But in recent years, eastern Uttar Pradesh has also witnessed the emergence of other backward castes like the Kurmis and Yadavs in Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Mirzapur and Basti. Together, the backwards constitute over 30 per cent of the electorate. They have been the main beneficiaries of the green revolution and their new-found affluence has brought them into the mainstream of political life where they are currently demanding a larger say. Since the Brahmins and Thakurs have aligned themselves with either the ruling party or the Janata party, the backwards have thrown their lot with the Lok Dal or the BJP.

The Muslims, on the other hand, are caught in a cleft stick. Comprising 12 per cent of the electorate in the east, their leaders have traditionally been hostile to the Congress(I). That leaves them the choice of supporting the RSM or the Lok Dal. Says Abdul Rahim, a schoolteacher in Gorakhpur district, despairingly: "What choice do we have? We are harassed by everybody because we don't have a caste leader to support us."

Though the educated voters of the area are making an attempt to raise issues like law and order and corruption in the judiciary, it is, quite literally, a voice in the wilderness. Consequently, the educated voter as well as shopkeepers and poor tenants are quite indifferent to the coming elections. They realise that the

toured 20 of the state's 57 districts and announced new government programmes which will cost the exchequer some Rs 300 crore even before the first vote is cast in the election. The chief minister declares: "I am an implementation man. If decisions remain on paper, what is the use of taking those decisions?"

While Tiwari burnt midnight oil, Singh was holding fort in the party's sprawling headquarters in Jawahar Bhavan. Assisted by seven general secretaries, in less than six weeks, Singh had completed a list of about 200 local issues in the state which, he felt, if tackled properly would return the party to a substantial majority in the state. Last fortnight, he was busy giving finishing touches to a map which sums up his task: it has key constituencies shaded in red, those in which the party is likely to be in trouble. The red smudge covers almost two-thirds of the state. Says Singh: "My task is to activate the village-level worker and ensure harmonious relations between various so-called factions."

But it was Tiwari on whom fell the task

overriding factors of caste and muscle power will continue to rule the roost long after the elections are over.

The frustration manifest in a small percentage of the population in the east is far more prominent in the western part of the state. "How can people remain unaffected by what they see around them?" asks Dr Shaol Huda, working for a large private company in Meerut. Huda is a representative of the more urbanised population in the industrialised west, and the dominant emotion all over is that of impotent anger at the breakdown of law and order, corruption, and the lack of a political party or leader who can offer them a better alternative. A few hundred yards from Huda's house is the large, modern bungalow of Kripal Singh, a prosperous farmer, one of a breed being found in increasing abundance in the area. But Kripal is bitter about being an agriculturist, which he says is no longer profitable. His brother-in-law, Harbir Singh, however, feels the problem in Uttar Pradesh is one of caste. Says he: "In Uttar Pradesh, there is no equality. The Brahmin is the one favoured most by the Government. After that comes the Harijan, the Muslim and the Bania. The Jat comes last. We are always ignored."

THE MUSLIMS, however, express much the same sentiments about their community. "The Government has done nothing to improve living conditions in Moradabad," says Mohammed Tariq, owner of a brassware manufacturing unit in the city. Dr Syed Kamal Fahim, the Imam, says even the communal trouble in the state is often fomented by politicians. "In the course of creating awareness among Harijans of their rights, some leaders are exciting them to hatred against Muslims, unfortunately," he says, sadly.

In his government residence in Lucknow, a Congress(I) Harijan leader is quite emphatic when he says: "It is the Lok Dal brand of politics that has led to an increase of atrocities against Harijans. When Charan Singh became prime minister, the Jats thought they could do anything."

That, more than anything else, indicates the grip that the caste factor has over the people of the area. The Jats and Brahmins. The Muslims and the Harijans. The Harijans and the Yadavs. All mistrust each other and are quite convinced that their own community has been done in by the other. Far from concern about the larger issues of corruption, unemployment, rising prices or national security, the only issue that excites the electorate is caste and community.

According to Ravinder Singh Yadav of Faridpur in Bareilly district: "Till 1977, the backward classes supported the Congress(I). Now they are being alienated. The failure of the Government to accept the Mandal Commission report on concessions to them has severely affected the backward vote." He adds: "They feel that under Congress(I) rule, the first preference goes to the Brahmins, then the Thakurs. The Yadav voter is convinced that he is being used."

Sitting in his room at the Aligarh Muslim University, A.F.Usmani, professor of political science, rationalises: "Caste today is no longer a social factor but a political symbol. They have become political groups and judging by current trends, in the future they will turn into more cohesive units in various political parties and exert even greater pressure to further their own interests."

Usmani, like many others, feels that the voter is not bothered about state or national issues. He has increasingly begun to believe that the only way to get results and attention is by being of nuisance value.

The only definite certainty is the distinct alienation of the Muslims from the Congress(I). The communal riots in Moradabad and Meerut in recent years have destroyed their faith in the Government's ability to protect them. Hakim Saifuddin Ahmed, 60, of Meerut, who is himself a Congressman, says: "Muslims make up a quarter of Meeruts population. Normally, 80 per cent of them have gone with the Congress(I). Today I doubt if more than 20 per cent will back the party." They are also cut up about the fact that the employment situation is as bleak as ever and assurances by the Government on issues like greater representation and the status of Urdu are still to be implemented. Asked who they will vote for, Muslim leaders say that it will be either the Lok Dal or the RSM but not out of faith in either. "It will be a resentment vote," explained one of them, echoing shades of deep pessimism.



"Caste today is no longer a social factor but a political symbol. Judging by current trends they will exert greater pressure to further their own interests."

A.F. USMANI
professor, Aligarh Muslim University



"The outcome of the elections will be decided purely on the basis of the number of guns or goons owned by a candidate or his supporter."

SUSHIL PAUL
advocate, Allahabad High Court

of coping with the nuts and bolts of the administration. "My main job is to keep the wheels of administration moving." And, move he did using his not inconsiderable clout at the Centre—he'd come from the Industry Ministry—to get things done for the state. So much so that his articulate Finance Minister, Brahm Dutt, admitted: "We do believe in political expediency. Any finance minister who completes his five-year term will enforce strict financial discipline in the first two years, maintain status quo for the next two years and resort to relaxation and concessions in the last. We will not hesitate to arrange funds for any development programme."

Among the sops handed out to the people of the state on the eve of the Lok Sabha election are:

- ▶ the immediate clearance of sugar cane arrears worth over Rs 90 crore;
- ▶ regularisation of all temporary government employees;
- ▶ release of Rs 70 crore by way of equity participation in over 100 joint sector industrial projects;
- ▶ distribution of Rs 15 crore worth of loans through the rural banks to more than 100,000 people on October 2;
- ▶ construction of Rs 70 crore worth of link roads in the countryside in the next three months, with work on 700 such roads launched simultaneously on October 2;
- ▶ provision of two-phased electricity to all the electrified villages at a cost of Rs 15 crore;
- ▶ repair or installation of power projects and the laying of new distribution lines at a cost of Rs 75 crore;
- ▶ sanctioning a grant of Rs 20 crore to zilla parishads to take up local development works;
- ▶ appointment of a corporation to finance the welfare of minorities;
- ▶ repairs to 17,000 state-owned tube-wells in the state at a cost of almost Rs 4 crore;
- ▶ revival of zilla parishads by nominating office-bearers.

Unlike at other times when good intentions seem to suffice, these announcements are being followed up on a day-to-day basis. An eight-member coordination committee, with Singh as convener and Tiwari and three ministers as members, has been reviewing progress. A control room has begun to function at Tiwari's official residence and is connected directly to all 57 district magistrates in the state, to the heads of all power plants and senior state government officials. Tiwari says that he speaks every day to all power plant general managers and selected district magistrates to get first-hand reports on what is going on.

Simultaneously, Singh has devised new ways of receiving information from the far-flung grassroots of his party organisation. These innovations bear the stamp of the still unproven managerial revolution that the Congress (I)'s new whiz-kids are seeking, but they have begun to yield a mine of information. To begin with, Singh asked all his general secretaries to find the views and grievances of each and every one of the party's 350-odd MLA's and Council members. These reports came in during September and listed local issues and conflicts which inevitably play a major part, quite out of proportion to their real importance, in candidates' election prospects.

At the same time, Singh activised some 50,000 Sewa Dal workers to fan out in the countryside and pick up details of rural development programmes and their effect on the voters. The workers, most of them paid a token honorarium, wheeled out their Congress (I)-bedecked bicycles and rode off into the countryside. The result: by early October, Lucknow's Nehru Bhavan, home of the Sewa Dal, was being stockpiled with the many reports they sent in, mostly about the malfunctioning of the administration. Said Singh: "The basic objective is to cross-check the claims of the bureaucracy and provide immediate relief upon receiving the reports from the Sewa Dal workers."

Singh claimed that the exercise has already started to yield results. For instance, it was the Sewa Dal volunteers who pointed out that over 40 per cent of the 17,000 tube-wells in the state weren't

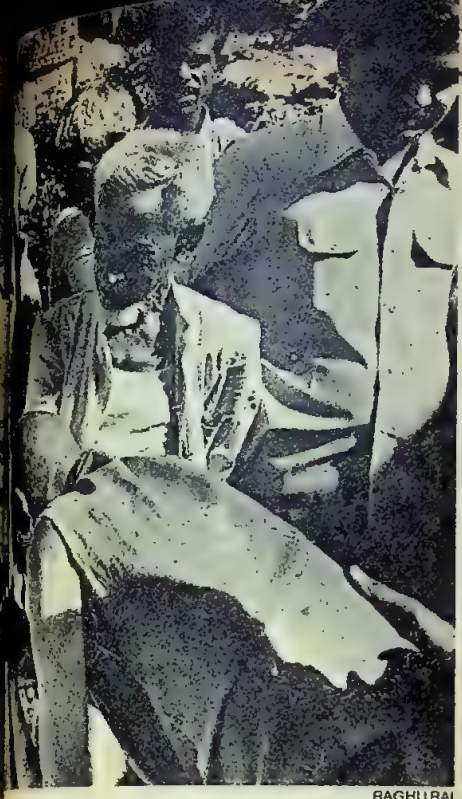


Rajiv Gandhi with supporters in Amethi: key campaigner

Menaka Gandhi on the campaign trail: aggressive onslaught

S. PREMI





RAGHU RAI

working. They also reported that repairs weren't being carried out because the Rs 3,000 per tube-well sanctioned was paid out as wages to technicians and nothing was left to buy spare parts.

Dry as it may sound as a list of administrative steps, this courtship of the Uttar Pradesh voter is actually the end result of a strategy devised by the Singh-Tiwari combine in consultation with New Delhi. It is based on two principles: delegate spending power to opinion leaders and target decisions to where they are likely to be most effective, in terms of power brokers, communities or income groups.

THUS, even before he finalised his schemes, Tiwari directed that the Government would allot Block Development Committees with funds equal to the land revenue earned by the Government in those blocks. This simple device immediately transferred Rs 32 crore to the block-level functionaries—which include politicians, mostly from the Congress(I). The money, an average of Rs 3 lakh to the state's 839 normal-sized blocks and Rs 4.5 lakh to its 41 large blocks, is to be spent by December 31 this year on water supply, school buildings and maintaining street lighting.

Gaon Sabhas, the lowest political village units lying defunct for some years, were also beneficiaries of this financial munificence. Each Gaon Sabha has been empowered to undertake development and construction work up to Rs 1 lakh without first obtaining higher official approval. Tiwari's Government didn't stop at the rural voter: each of the state's 467 Town and Notified Area Committees has been given an additional grant of Rs 50,000 each. The state's municipal bodies have, likewise, got Rs 75,000 each.

Yet another attempt to woo local chieftains at the block and village level was the Government's decision to revive zilla parishads, to which elections were held in 1983. But the Government hadn't taken the next logical step forward, to order the election of parishad chiefs, because group rivalries might have cut the ground from under the Congress (I)'s feet. But zilla parishads continue to wield considerable financial and administrative clout in the districts, and the Government has now decided to revive them with a cabinet minister in charge of each.

What this means in practical terms is that more than 5,000 political functionaries like gram pradhans, block pramukhs, MLA's and MP's, will now have a say in directing the work of official agencies in the countryside. Patronage in terms of development spending—on hand pumps, drains, aid for the deprived—control on all this will pass to the favoured few and can be expected to yield dividends to the Congress (I). Says a senior state government official: "By this one action alone, the ruling party will give politicians supremacy over the bureaucracy and will undoubtedly get political mileage at the village level."

Schemes to woo sectional voters weren't far in coming. Among the steps announced:

- ► a rise in the kind wages of 7 lakh rural workers to 2 kg a day from 1 kg earlier involving an additional government subsidy of Rs 13 crore;
- ► loans to some 100,000 families living below subsistence level, of Rs 6,000 each at a 4 per cent rate of interest with the Government paying banks 15 to 18 per cent of the amount;
- ► bonus payments to 40,000 government employees earning Rs 1,600 a month or less worth 18 days' salary. The cost to the Government: Rs 40 crore;
- ► payment of four additional dearness allowance installments due between January 1 and June 1 this year.

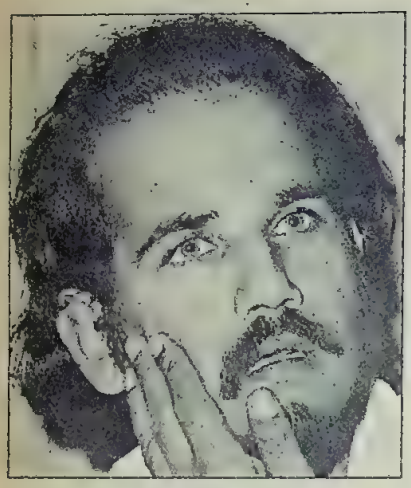
With the privilege of choosing its target groups, the Government has made sure that communities like cobblers, barbers, tailors, rickshaw-pullers, bullock cart owners and small artisans have benefited. The Opposition is naturally upset. Alleges state Bharatiya Janata Party General Secretary, Kalraj Mishra: "These are all election-eve gimmicks and will lead to corruption and squandering of public money for political purposes." Says Akbar Ahmed of the RSM: "The Congress(I) by announcing new concessions is trying to whitewash its four years of maladmini-

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Charan Singh talking to voters in Aligarh: dominant role

BHAWAN SINGH



The Congress(I) by announcing new concessions is trying to whitewash its four years of maladministration and corruption.

AKBAR AHMED
Rashtriya Sanjay Manch

stration and corruption."

More important, the Congress(I) is wooing the Harijans and Muslims, communities that are believed to have deserted the party in recent months. The Cabinet's decision last fortnight to set up a corporation to finance industrial ventures by minority entrepreneurs is an unprecedented move which could create communal divisions. The corporation—which is the 71st in the state—will provide seed money and equity participation. The move comes in the wake of complaints that the four financial institutions in the state were discriminating against them. Officials deny this. Says one, who does not wish to be identified: "We have given sufficient loans to Muslims and not even a single application has been rejected."

THE MUSLIMS are key to the Congress(I)'s poll prospects. They constitute 11 per cent of the total election and can determine the outcome of at least 20, almost one quarter of the state's Lok Sabha seats. The party is worried: in 1980, the Lok Dal ran away with six of the 18 seats won by Muslim candidates, and since then the community has been alienated from the Congress(I) by its handling of communal riots the worst of which occurred in Meerut, Moradabad and Bhiwandi, and the killings in Assam last year.

The other segment that has the Government worried is the Harijans, long time vote banks for the ruling party but now exhibiting a mind of their own. With some 23 per cent of the state made up of Harijans, they are even more decisive than the Muslims in determining the fortunes of the Congress(I). In the last parliamentary election, the Lok Dal took nine of the 18 Scheduled Caste seats although the Congress(I) managed to hit back in the June Assembly election by taking 71 of the 92 reserved seats when as the state PCC(I) General Secretary Gulab Sehra says, Congress(I) took 80 per cent of the total Harijan vote.

The route to the Harijan heart, in this case, lies via reservations. The state Government last month decided to restore reservations in promotions in government service—a facility that had been suspended by the Janata government in the '70s. The Government's order directed public sector undertakings to ensure an 18 per cent reservation for scheduled castes in their future recruitment and promotions. The Government was moved to act when Tiwari learned of growing discontent among Harijans, and realised that in spite of solid support in the past, the segment could no longer be taken for granted.

The one incident that stood out occurred in Kanpur on September 23 when Sehra addressed a rhetorical question to his largely Harijan audience, asking what had the Harijans got in return for restoring

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It is due to us (the Harijans) that the party is ruling the country and the state. Are we getting proportional representation in the Government? If not, why not?

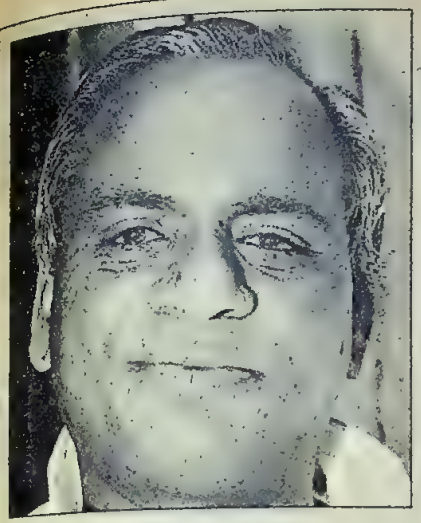
GULAB SEHRA
PCC(I) general secy.

the Congress(I) to office time and again. Sehra said: "It is due to this that the party is ruling the country and the state. Are we getting proportional representation in the government? If not, why not?" The refrain was picked up by Harijan speakers and later at a dinner with Singh and Tiwari the Harijan leaders warned the leadership



Jeeps and other election material for Amethi: all set

S. PREMI



If we are able to put up a single candidate against the Congress(I) it will be completely wiped out.

KALYAN SINGH
BJP president



We are trying to avoid splitting the votes. All of us have realised that we are not each other's enemy, but that everybody's enemy is the Congress(I).

MOHAN SINGH
Chief whip, Lok Dal, U.P. Assembly

that the Harijans might turn against the Government if not given due attention. It was a classic case of political pressurising just before an election, and Narain Dutt Tiwari, with his brief to appease and win, succumbed.

But more than the Harijans it is the region of western Uttar Pradesh that has traditionally been dominated by Charan Singh and his Lok Dal that has attracted the Government's keenest attention. V. P. Singh has invested more time in this area than any other, addressing more than 100 public meetings in the last one month. And, Tiwari's administration hasn't lagged far behind: it has announced repeated concessions to the 10 million voters of this region.

To begin with, the Government took over the management of 12 sick sugar mills employing some 5,000 workers. Employment apart, this cleared some Rs 5 crore in unpaid cane arrears. Admitted Tiwari: "In view of the importance of sugarcane to the state economy, we are definitely giving special attention to develop and promote this sector." With commendable despatch and an ear to the farmer voter in the region, Tiwari also ordered sugar mills to clear Rs 91 crore in cane arrears, something that no administration had previously been able to do. Sure enough, privately owned mills were less than willing to oblige, so Tiwari came up with his usual solution: the state Government offered financial support and "persuaded" the banks to advance them loans. The state Government exempted mills from paying Rs 23 crore earlier collected as purchase tax from growers and the Reserve Bank of India sanctioned a loan of Rs 12 crore while another Rs 10 crore due to cane growers as interest on delayed payments, was written off. The party expects all this to pay handsome dividends. State general secretary responsible for western Uttar Pradesh, Sri Krishan Goel, said: "We will explode the myth that this area is a Lok Dal bastion or Charan Singh's pocket borough."

S PREMI



The Congress (I) is not certain that any of this will pay off unless the party gears itself to tackle tricky caste equations that have bedevilled the state's politics and so often determined which way the result would go. When Singh took over, of the party's 57 district committees, 29 were headed by Brahmins and 8 by Thakurs although the two communities together account for no more than 16 per cent of the state's population. This Brahmin-Thakur domination extends to other political positions, and has been a source of constant friction and factionalism in the party.

INSTEAD of changing this composition, which might have invited other problems, Singh chose to tell the so-called backward castes that their interest would be protected at the time of issuing tickets. To prove his point, Singh constituted a special 25-member election campaign committee for each parliamentary constituency and ensured that each community was adequately represented.

The best of intentions often go astray and the danger is that if the money doesn't reach where it is intended if it is siphoned off as frequently happens to line politicians' pockets, the whole programme may

rebound. In any case, the voter today is no simpleton—time and again he has shown that incentive or no incentive, he quite definitely knows his mind.

The wooing has been sustained. The suitor is tenacious but his quarry has other options and is not inclined to reveal her mind so soon. The arithmetic of Uttar Pradesh's political composition encourages the Opposition to think that it too has a chance of walking away with the bride. Where the Congress(I) has goodies to part with, the Opposition has rhetoric. Telling rhetoric about law and order, the Congress (I)'s intolerance of democratic norms and its dynastic rule. But ultimately, they too are banking on the rampant caste factor in the state. Which prompts president of the Gorakhpur University Teachers Association, Ashok—he declines to identify his second, caste name—to say: "It is unfortunate that even after 36 years of Independence, caste continues to play a dominant role in the vote for a party or candidate. Obviously, all the massive investment in higher education has completely gone down the drain."

Where the ruling party has been identified with the Thakurs, Brahmins and Harijans, the middle castes like the Kur-

PSEPHOLOGY

UP Swings

IT IS not just its sheer size that makes Uttar Pradesh critical in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Its electorate, which will return 85 MP's to the Lok Sabha, 60 per cent more than the next largest, Bihar, has other attributes that compel attention. The state has a high 'floating vote' and core, loyal support for any party is very small. Through seven parliamentary seats, the electorate has established itself to be extremely volatile.



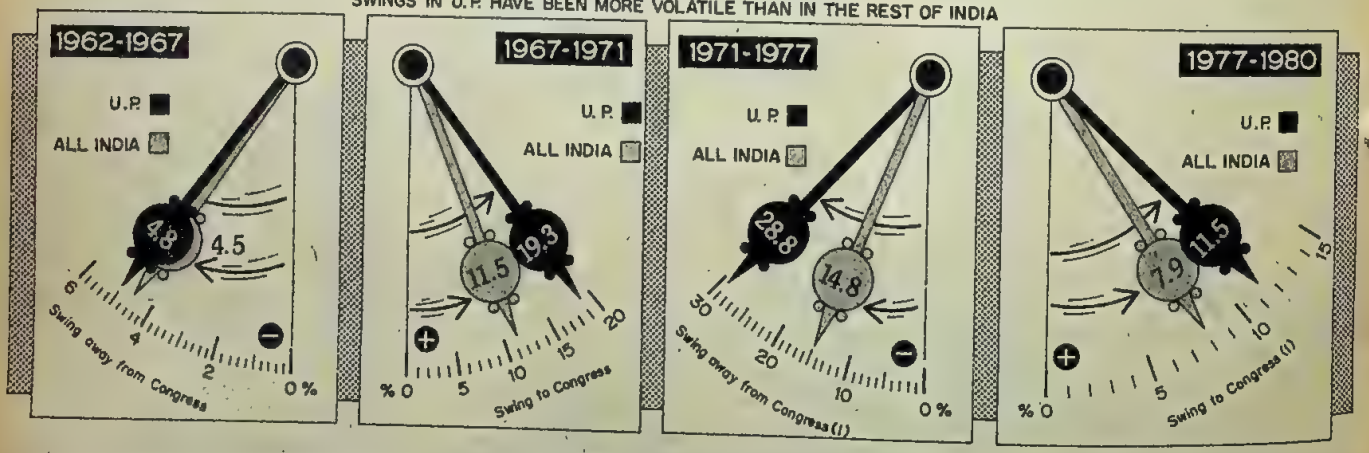
The Congress vote, for example dropped to 33 per cent in 1967 and 25 per cent in 1977 from peaks of 53 per cent in 1952 and 49 per cent in 1971. Opposition parties have come and gone, flashing brightly if briefly to secure as much as 20 per cent in an election before being extinguished quickly in the next.

Party support in Uttar Pradesh this time round is probably even more fragile than in the past: victory margins in 1980 were exceptionally narrow. In the Lok Sabha election that year, the Congress(I)'s margin of victory was 12 per cent for the whole country; in Uttar Pradesh it was a mere 4.4 per cent. It takes a very small swing of opinion to wipe out such a slender margin—which suggests that the ruling party's hold on the state is tenuous. The opposition parties don't fare much better either: the Janata Party's record 43 per cent victory margins in 1977 were all but wiped out in the 1980 elections by the huge swing in favour of the Congress(I) and the disintegration of opposition unity. This time round, too, the fate of these parties will be determined by the level of opposition unity and the swing in popular vote. PRANNOY ROY *analyses the poll possibilities.*

Charts by B.K. SHARMA

SWINGS IN VOTES

SWINGS IN U.P. HAVE BEEN MORE VOLATILE THAN IN THE REST OF INDIA



THE SWING in popular vote—measured for each constituency by the change in Congress percentage vote between two elections—in U.P. has always been in the same direction as the national swing. But U.P. is more decidedly volatile than the rest of the country: the average swing in U.P. has always been much larger than the national swing. Between the 1977 and 1980 elections, U.P. recorded an 11.5 per cent swing in favour of the Congress(I) compared to a 7.9 per cent swing for the country. In the massive swing away from the ruling Congress(I) in 1977, the U.P. swing of 28.8 per cent was twice the national swing.

Big swings arise out of a large uncommitted floating vote that is generally believed to be caused by a section of the community—a particular caste, religion or class—switching its allegiance *en bloc*. The caste or class composition of swings has not yet been studied carefully in India—unlike in Western democracies where the social origins of swings have been well documented—and the common Indian paradigm that "caste is all that matters" in elections is not based on rigorous scrutiny. It is important to distinguish between levels of party support which may depend on caste and religion and swings in votes which may depend on other factors too.

The swing back to the Congress(I) in 1980 of 11.5 per cent was less than the swing away of 14.8 per cent in its 1977 debacle and 1980 did not see a full recovery for the Congress(I) since it got only 35.9 per cent of the vote. Consequently, from the Congress(I)'s point of view it can still hope for some improvement in its popular vote especially since the average Congress support in U.P. over the last seven elections has been 40 per cent. The opposition parties will look to stemming the Congress(I) swing and reducing its vote. But the main hope for the Opposition lies in its fighting as a more united front. Swings depend on voters and unity on politicians.

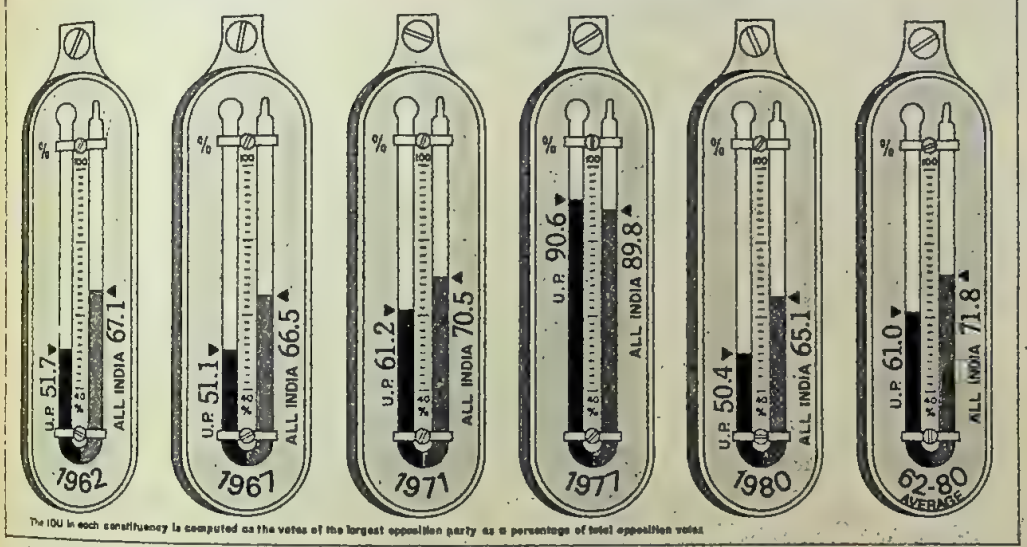
mis, Ahirs, Banias and Bhumikars who make up a not inconsiderable 46 per cent of the population tend to be placed on the side of the Opposition ranks. For instance, studying the pattern of caste break-up in party appointments, of the 57 Lok Dal district presidents, no fewer than 25 are Yadavs—and the Lok Dal is not surprisingly the biggest single threat to the Congress(I) in the coming elections.

Basing themselves on this caste arithmetic, opposition leaders are trying to forge a workable unity that will eventually provide for the sum of their caste blocs rather than divide them into fragments that will help the Congress(I). Says Mohan Singh, chief whip of the Lok Dal in the state Assembly: "We are trying to avoid splitting the votes. All of us have realised that we are not each other's enemy, but that everybody's enemy is the Congress(I)." Adds BJP President Kalyan Singh: "If we are able to put up a single candidate against the Congress(I) it will be completely wiped out."

Present indications are that the non-communist Opposition, comprising the Lok Dal, Janata, BJP and the RSM will contest 82 of the state's 85 seats, leaving only three to the Communist Party of India and

THE INDEX OF OPPOSITION UNITY

THE OPPOSITION IN U.P. HAS BEEN MORE DISUNITED THAN IN THE REST OF INDIA



The IOU in each constituency is computed as the votes of the largest opposition party as a percentage of total opposition votes

A FRAGMENTED opposition has been a major determinant of election results in U.P. The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) which ranges between zero and 100—a higher IOU signifies a more united opposition with 100 representing a single party united opposition—has averaged a low 61 for U.P. over the last five elections compared to the national IOU average of 71.8 in the same period. U.P.'s average IOU is the lowest of any state in the country and has been lower than the national average in each election except 1977 when it reached a remarkable peak of 90.6, marginally above the nationwide IOU of 89.8.

While the generally low IOU in U.P. has been a major contributory factor in Congress victories it can also be a potentially powerful force to defeat the Congress(I) this time. In 1980 the IOU in U.P. was only 50.4, the lowest it has ever been. Starting with this low base, any improvement in the unity of the Opposition can considerably damage Congress(I) prospects.

As a very rough guide, every 3 per cent increase in the IOU is as effective as a one per cent swing away from the Congress(I). Thus, if the IOU reaches a moderate 75 in U.P. in these elections—25 over the 1980 level—it would be approximately equivalent to an 8 per cent swing away from the Congress(I).

Effective opposition unity to defeat the Congress does not depend on the number of parties fighting the election—1977 for instance, when the Opposition was most united, also had the largest number of parties contesting but there were a host of minor parties in the fray. What is important is the number of important or effective parties that are opposing the Congress(I).

Consequently, if the currently fragmented opposition unites into two major blocks —the UF and the NDA —the IOU may not improve. After all, these two blocks could split the opposition votes in each constituency right down the middle and thereby effectively help the Congress(I) as the IOU would still be a miserable 50. An agreement on seat adjustments between these two blocks could in itself increase the IOU to 75 and, of course, if the Opposition merges into one united front the IOU could once again attain the high levels it reached in 1977. In technical terms of election strategy this would have the same impact on winning seats even though the spirit of the 1977 merger may not exist.

CONGRESS (I) SEATS WON

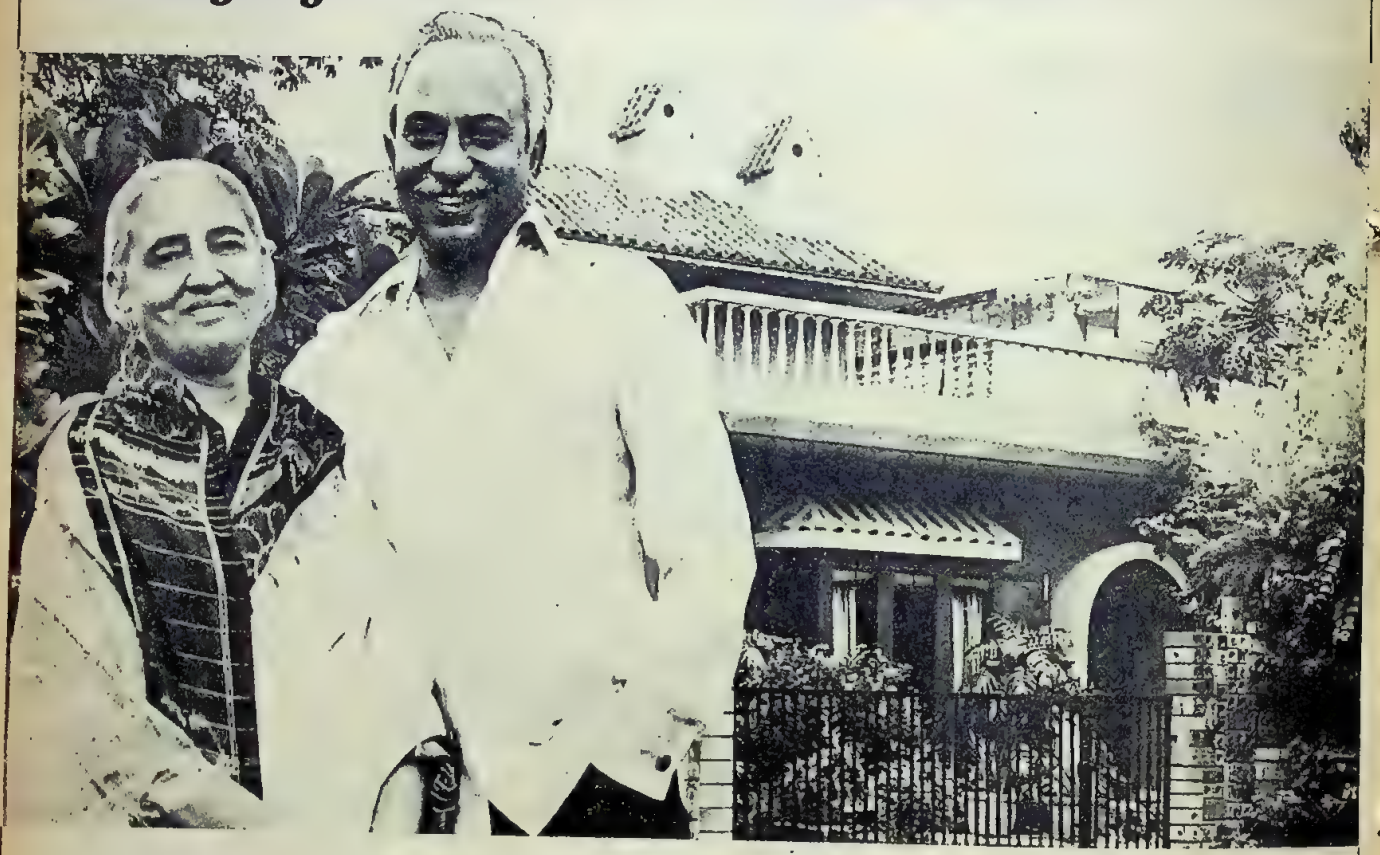
at different levels of opposition unity and popular vote

CONG.(I) VOTES % \ IOU	45	50 (1980 Results)	75	90
30.0 %	40	32	8	5
36.0 % (1980 Results)	58	51	22	9
40.0 %	64	62	30	21
45.0 %	81	76	50	32

No. of Seats

This table shows the number of seats the Congress(I) will win in U.P. at different levels of the popular vote and the degree of Opposition unity. In 1980, the Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) was 50 and the party polled 36 per cent of the popular vote to win 51 seats. If the popular vote remains unchanged this time, but the Opposition is better united —say, an IOU of 75, the Congress(I) will win only 22 seats. If Opposition unity does not change from its 1980 level but the Congress(I) vote rises to 40 per cent, the party will win 62 seats. Most likely, both will change and the IOU and swing could even counteract each other if the Congress(I) vote goes up to 45 per cent, and the IOU up to 75, there will be virtually no change in the number of seats held by either side. Readers can make their own estimates of what will happen in different situations.

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the Congress(S). The electoral understanding among these parties will be to pool resources—money and manpower—and pool caste backing. The Lok Dal is banking on the support of the Jats, Ahirs and the backward castes. The RSM hopes to deliver a sizeable Muslim vote while the Janata and the BJP are working on cutting into Brahmin, Thakur and middle class support for the Congress(I). It is precisely this caste factor that has led Charan Singh and Chandra Shekhar to come together: without a strong Thakur or Brahmin by his side, Charan Singh would under no circumstances, fare any better than he did in 1980.

But Uttar Pradesh, the slothful giant among Indian states, remains an enigma. It has in the past gobbled up vast investments made by suitors and flicked them aside with contempt. Charan Singh as prime minister in 1979 authorised some Rs 1,200 crore worth of spending and had to eat humble pie. It is the most fickle of states (*see page 80*), the most sensitive to changes of popular mood. Margins of victory are tiny, and its society unpredictably fragmented. And yet, it has made and unmade leaders, governments, prime ministers. Its politics has been star-studded, its political offsprings luminaries. It is, in a word, the final arbiter of Indian politics. What happens here in the coming weeks could well change the present course of events and determine who will rule India next. —PRABHU CHAWLA



ZONAL FACTORS

WHEN there is a swing towards or away from any party it tends to be uniform across a large number of constituencies. The phenomenon of the uniform swing is widely observed in western democracies and it has been noticed in India too over the last seven elections. However, unlike other democracies the swings in India are not the same all over the country. Swings vary from state to state and even within states for which homogenous swing zones can be observed which sometimes cross state borders.

Three clear swing zones in U.P. emerge between the 1977 and 1980 election (see Map 1). The central belt, covering about 32 constituencies, showed a strong swing of over 15 per cent in favour of the Congress(I). This central belt forms a Congress stronghold and covers most of the constituencies which it won in 1980 (see Map 3).

The western swing zone, identifiable with Charan Singh's obviously immense mass base, reduced the swing in favour of the Congress(I) in 1980— to below 15 per cent. This western swing zone flows into Haryana where the Lok Dal support is also considerable.

The smallest swing zone in eastern U.P. covers 17 constituencies and once again represents the Lok Dal leader's long coat-tails and his power to attract votes. A majority of the seats in this zone were won by the Lok Dal in 1980. Chandrashekhar's constituency, Ballia, falls in this zone but his own narrow 6 per cent victory margin in the last elections suggests that in terms of mass support he is a lightweight in comparison with Charan Singh.

The unity of the Opposition in 1980 varied considerably within U.P. (Map 2) and the electors appear to have reacted sharply against the Opposition in constituencies where it was most disunited. The central belt, where the swing in favour of the Congress(I) was the strongest is also the region where Opposition unity was at its lowest. Once again, the western region over which Charan Singh's influence is greatest, reports the highest level of Opposition unity.

The margin of victory in any constituency is often used as an indicator of the vulnerability of that seat to swings in votes. Seats with smaller margins are usually the first to change hands when there is an overall swing away from the incumbent's party. Several factors—such as the candidates' personalities, changed Opposition unity— can, however, intervene to disturb any relation between the extent of the victory margin and the degree of vulnerability of a seat.

Of the 51 seats held by the Congress(I), 20 seats are more vulnerable than the rest as their margins of victory are all under 10 per cent (see Map 3). These vulnerable seats are on the periphery of the core central region where the Congress(I) won with the greatest margins.

On the other hand, of the 34 seats held by Opposition parties 17 seats were won with margins of under 10 per cent and would be vulnerable to swing in favour of the Congress(I). The remaining seats with larger victory margins are situated in the western region of the state.

LOK SABHA POLL

Occasion for Change



THE COMING elections may be one of the last opportunities for restoring accountability to our public life. Unless the Opposition does better in these than it did in the last elections, this opportunity too will be lost. And the Opposition cannot even hope to do better if the current 'unity talks' remain the farce they have become.

Why are the talks stuck? How can the stalemate be broken? The first reason on account of which the talks have got stuck is that the principal participants in the negotiations have been the leaders from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—the precise states in which the Opposition is in the greatest disarray. Most of the leaders outside these states, leaders who actually have acquired a base in their regions, have had fitful, and then, too little say in the negotiations.

Second, among the leaders of these three states, the short-sighted calculations of others have delivered the veto to Charan Singh—the one among them who is the most obdurate, the one among them who is least capable of convincing the people that the Opposition represents a political culture different from that of Mrs Gandhi and her party.

Several types of calculations have delivered him the veto. The Bharatiya Janata Party for instance, has had a phobia since 1977 of getting isolated, of being left alone; it was thus the first to boost him. In the Janata, on the other hand, internal dissensions are what have contributed to strengthening Charan Singh: several in it have kept up a liaison with him as a device for blackmailing the central leadership of the party. 'Do as we say or we will go over to Charan Singh'. Finally, in the unity talks the negotiating process has been such that those who have no base at all have had as much say in it as the others; the predominant, many would say the exclusive, concern of the former has been to ensure that they win at least their own seats; this they have felt, they cannot do without Charan Singh's help, or at least without 'neutralising' him; they have therefore been proposing one 'formula' after another which brings him back centre-stage.

Third, old fears as well as new hopes have come in the way. The Janata, for instance, has been gripped by the old fear—'we have no cadre, BJP has one; if the two parties join we will be swallowed up'. It has also been fed the new hope—'the Muslims are breaking away from Mrs Gandhi; to get their vote you must keep away from the BJP'. Both have kept its leaders from doing what they know is necessary as well as inevitable.

Finally, there has been the basic conception of the electorate that these leaders seem to have. They believe that the voter will go by narrow, parochial considerations, that these differ from section to section, from region to region, that as each leader commands the allegiance of particular sections the one way for them to make it is for Bahuguna to join his 'influence' among Muslims to the 'influence' of Charan Singh among the Jats, for the two together to join these with the influence of Karpoori Thakur among the 'backward castes' *ad infinitum*.



As is the prince, so are the people...

Given this conception of the electorate —that it is fragmented, that it will act on narrow, parochial considerations, considerations particular to each block and region—everyone has seemed indispensable, Charan Singh most of all: for one thing, among the north Indian leaders he is rumoured to have the larger 'base', and then there is his single-mindedness, which is no rumour: 'Unless you do as I say, I will split the Opposition vote', and all the other negotiators are convinced that unless they do, he will.

As leaders in Delhi have shown that they cannot break this stalemate, the initiative should be seized by others.

First, leaders who have established a base in their states—Farooq Abdullah, Rama Krishna Hegde, NTR, Sharad Pawar, Ratubhai Adani, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and others—should meet *independently* of the Delhi *panchayat*. Most of them have already worked out or are in so dominant a position that they can quickly work out electoral adjustments in their states. They should meet and announce the understandings they have worked out. And they should spell out the formula at the national level that *they find satisfactory*, the formula to which the leaders in the Hindi belt must adhere to secure the former's cooperation.

Second, voters who feel that Mrs Gandhi should be cut to size but who are fed up with the Charan Singhs should make themselves heard, they should bombard leaders like Chandra Shekhar and Vajpayee with an unequivocal message "if Charan Singh is your alternative to Mrs Gandhi, we will stay home rather than vote for you." And they should not just send the message but act on it, come judgement day.

I BELIEVE that the conception that these leaders have of the electorate, of the considerations on which it is liable to act is fundamentally wrong. It isn't just that some of the bases are just not additive, they aren't of course, the election itself is going to be a truly national election—that is, the electorate will be addressing itself to a truly *national* issue. It is the issue that Mrs Gandhi has defined: 'The country is in danger; who can save it, I or this lot?'

The people sense that the country is in danger. They also do not require much persuasion that it is Mrs Gandhi's politics which is endangering it. But for their disenchantment to acquire a focus they must be convinced of two things: first, that the Opposition leaders have in fact learnt a lesson, that their conduct will be different from what it was in 1977-79, indeed different from what it has been since 1980 too; second, that the principal ones among the Opposition are from a political culture that is diametrically different from that of Mrs Gandhi and her party, or at least that they are able to bring into public life persons who are manifestly from a different culture. To make even a beginning on this the Opposition will have to do—and those committed to democracy should hold it to doing—at least two things. First, the Opposition must keep out half a dozen of the most conspicuous wreckers who demolished it in 1977-79, as well as those whose conduct has been most dis-

ruptive since 1980. They may be brilliant and resourceful and important, but they should be put to other work than being set up as candidates of the Opposition. If you field the Raj Narains you just can't convince anyone that you have learnt a lesson.

Second, it is evident that a different type than the conventional politician must be inducted into public life in India —both because a greater degree of expert knowledge and experience needs to be brought to bear on it than the conventional politician possesses and because the only way to rescue it is to bring in persons who live by a more honourable set of values. In private and even from public platforms the Opposition leaders declaim about the need of a new politics. Their sincerity will be evident only if they actually set aside a perceptible portion of the seats for persons of excellence, for persons who are *not* politicians and who even after the elections will continue to remain independents.

Neither of these is a talisman. But both will help indicate whether the Opposition has learnt a lesson or not, of whether it has the resilience to chart a new course, of whether it is alert enough to perceive at least its own interest.

ON THIS matter, as on others, the voters can take the initiative. First, they should not leave the selection of candidates to the political parties alone. If these parties plump as usual for the conventional politicians alone, citizens should persuade men and women among them to stand whose record of service to the community, of independence is manifest, who live by values that alone will redeem our public life, who have the expertise that needs to be brought to bear on the conduct of public affairs. There are such men in plenty. They are deterred by the fact that politics, specially the elections, have become such a dirty business. And yet, if such men are continually kept out, our public life will continue to hurtle downwards. We must seek such persons out and persuade them to shed their distaste for dirtying their hands, to shed most of all their fear of failure.

Commitment is the best way to persuade them. This means that when we set about inviting such persons to stand we should guarantee to them that *we* will campaign for them, that *we* will raise the necessary funds for them, that we will seek out and provide for them the skills—for designing posters, for devising slogans—that a campaign requires.

Careful selection of constituencies too will help. We should select constituencies in which the candidate of the ruling party is particularly venal, a particularly undesirable specimen, that is one whose very name symbolises the political culture that has brought us to the present pass. It is to him that we should counterpose a man whose very name symbolises service, integrity, independence. The mere announcement of the two names would conclude half the election campaign. The man of service and integrity whom we want to persuade will thus be that much more agreeable. And the electors would get the clearest possible choice, not just between two parties or two persons but between two cultures. A score, even a dozen such contests will be a beginning.



...as are the people, so is the prince.

Having identified and persuaded such candidates, citizens should persuade the opposition parties to unanimously support such candidates—we should persuade the parties that they should support them *precisely because* these persons, should they win, will remain independent, precisely because they will keep a watch on *whoever* it is who comes to power. Should the Opposition parties refuse to support even a dozen such candidates, the public will get an opportunity to learn how sincere they are in wanting to chart a new course.

Second, in each election we ask the politicians to make it an issues-based election. We have seen that they don't. Most of them can't. But why not do so ourselves? Citizens should list the issues that recent experience suggests are important: electoral reform; an anti-defection law; a collegium that will be consulted for all appointments by manipulating which the executive has prostituted one institution after another; Lok Pals and Lok Ayukts who will have unbridled powers to examine the conduct of all public servants, including 'the highest in the land'; more expeditious and cheaper justice, and others. They should carefully assess what each of the parties says on each of these issues, and how specific is what it says. Each time the candidates come to address them, citizens should ask them to state their views on these issues, to spell out specifically their commitments on them, to pledge themselves on issues like defection. And then they should organise themselves to monitor what the victor does about his pledges and commitments, to bring him to heel should he depart from them. The people of Andhra Pradesh have just made a beginning in enforcing an anti-defection law. We should build on the victory.

Third, there is little use in merely retailing to each other the apprehension that there will be large-scale rigging this time round. We should ascertain how and at what stages such rigging is likely—will fake names be put on the rolls, will persons other than those whose names are on the rolls cast the votes, will booths be captured, will blocks of voters be kept away, will money and liquor be used to buy voters, will something be done when the ballot boxes are being transported? Having ascertained the technology, voters, even small groups will do, should organise themselves to preempt such steps.

These elections are too important to be left to the whims of the politicians alone. The basic fact about our public life today is that our rulers are out of reach, that they are accountable to no one. And they are so because the average citizen does not put himself out on matters that do not concern him immediately, and personally. The elections are yet another opportunity to reverse this state of affairs.

We cannot shirk our duties and then go on blaming the rulers for taking advantage of the situation that, by our apathy and indifference, we ourselves create. As usual Gandhiji put the matter well. Writing in *Young India* almost 60 years ago he said: "The popular saying, 'as is the king, so are the people', is only a half truth. That is to say it is no more true than its converse, 'as are the people, so is the prince.' Where the subjects are watchful a prince is entirely dependent on them for his status. Where the subjects are overtaken by sleepy indifference, there is every possibility that the prince will cease to function as a protector and will become an oppressor instead. Those who are not wide awake have no right to blame their prince..."

Photographs by RAGHAVENDRA RAO



A performance in progress: mass contact

TAMIL NADU

Silencing Protest

IN CERTAIN districts of Tamil Nadu, the Naxalites had sought to mobilise the rural masses in the struggle for their rights through the preaching of violence. In the last two years, the Naxalites have been replaced by nascent left-oriented civil rights groups who have decided that cultural and artistic propaganda is a more effective way of educating and motivating the rural population. But the response from the state police is the same as it was in the case of the Naxalites: ruthless suppression of the new form of expression. Members of the cultural troupes are being arrested indiscriminately and spokesmen for the groups claim false cases are being registered against them. To investigate the charges, correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI *toured the districts where the groups are most active, North Arcot, Dharmapuri and Ramanathapuram. His report:*

LIKE villagers elsewhere in the country, the people of Karuthur in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu have little to entertain themselves with at the end of a hard day's toil. So when they heard that a group of singers would perform one evening, six months ago, they gathered with enthusiasm at the open grounds. Soon they were caught up in the emotion of the songs, which told passionately, angrily of the murder of innocent fellow-Tamils in Sri Lanka. Suddenly, almost out of nowhere, the police swooped down on the 12 singers—five of whom were children—and bore them off to jail. Cases were registered under Sections 75 (enhanced punishment for certain offences after previous conviction), 147 (rioting) 353 (deterring a public servant from discharge of his duty), 383 (extortion), and 506 (intimidation). The children were released after three days; the adults after a month, but all 12 have to periodically sign up at a magistrate's court in Harur, 30 km away.

If the police reaction seems all out of proportion to the incident, the fact is that the singers were all members of the left-oriented People's Art Forum (PAF) or its youth wing. Amballi Muniraj, a Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) district leader from Dharmapuri, says bitterly: "PAF and Revolutionary Youth League (RYL) members are now being arrested left, right and centre on foisted criminal cases. And that in spite of the fact that we have now realised that indiscriminate killings had cost us dearly."

In fact, arrests follow public meetings and cultural programmes or any other activites of such groups almost routinely. Often the flimsiest-seeming excuse will do. For instance, in Kadathur village in Dharmapuri district, Chellappan and 11 others of the RYL were arrested when they were merely distributing pamphlets. And in Harur, similarly, six RYL workers were arrested for sticking wall posters announcing a party meeting. In another instance, the Organisation for Civil and Democratic Rights (OCDR) put up street plays in Kavapattarai village in North Arcot district for three successive days in May. On the morning of the fourth day, police plainclothesmen descended on the village, interrogating even children about the plays, and who had gone to see them. A small farmer of the village, Murugan, described the aftermath: "After the plays were staged, a pall of terror has descended on our village. We can't even go about our agricultural work freely." Soon after, nine members of the OCDR were arrested on charges of preventing witnesses from giving evidence in a murder case. They were later released on bail, but one of them, Ilangovan, was rearrested on a charge of attempted murder.

The police says that Ilangovan tried to kill Tirupathi, a landlord of Kavapattarai village, on the night of July 1 this year. Tirupathi's July 2 police complaint states: "Last night, when I was sleeping outside my hut in my cot, I suddenly woke to find four people armed with sickles around me. I could recognise the four clearly. They were Ilangovan, Devaraj, Chandran (all OCDR members from Tirupattur), and my



Police patrolling a village: ruthless action

own brother Nagarajan." He adds that they threatened him, but finally left him alone. But the fact is that there is a long-standing family dispute between Tirupathi and Nagarajan, and Kuppusamy, a villager, argues: "Tirupathi had originally complained to the police only about Nagarajan. The police extended this complaint to cover Ilangovan and the others."

In yet another case, four workers of the AYL were arrested in Naickenkottai village near Dharmapuri town in June. They had been going around collecting money to install the statues of Balan and L. Appu, famous civil rights martyrs, in their village. T.N. Gopalan, an *Indian Express* staff reporter who was witness to the arrest, describes it: "The boys were just walking down the street, talking amongst themselves. I was approaching them to talk to them when a police van suddenly appeared on the scene from nowhere. A handful of policemen herded the boys into the van without any explanation." They were booked under Sections 341 (wrongful restraint of others) and 386 (extortion by putting a person in fear of death or grievous hurt).

The civil liberties groups are discovering that even keeping strictly within the letter of the law doesn't pay. The People's Art and Literature Association planned a public meeting and cultural programme in Ranipet in North Arcot district on May 31. Just to be on the safe side, they decided to get permission from the police, although, as OCDR president and lawyer P.V. Bhakthavathsalam says, "unless there is a specific ban order in force, we don't have to obtain police permission for a public meeting". The local sub-inspector of police refused permission. In his note, he said: "Refused. Get permission from collector, North Arcot district, for conducting drama. You shall give petition well in advance." The association then decided to cancel the cultural programme and just hold a meeting. The sub-inspector again asked them to go to the collector. The meeting had to be postponed to June 17. Again, their overcautiousness led them on a merry dance. "We approached the district collector straight, for permission, but he put us on to the revenue divisional officer, who in turn asked us to get back to the sub-inspector. Thoroughly ragged, we sent the application to the sub-inspector by registered post. It came back marked 'addressee not available'," says a frustrated P.V. Ramanujam, OCDR member from Tirupattur. The meeting was held regardless, but two days later, three people who were in the audience—Bharathi, Vijayan and Selvam—were arrested on charges of theft.

Arrests follow public meetings and cultural programmes held by civil rights groups almost routinely.

Young PAF activist Pavel, who was arrested



Despite such overt and covert police attempts to snaffle the activities of the civil liberties groups, they are evidently gaining popularity with the villagers. Thus, when PAF members sing forcefully, "all of us poor people were born to one mother—the crowd that oppresses us and lives on our sweat is born to street-dogs," the village crowd responds with emotion. Songs

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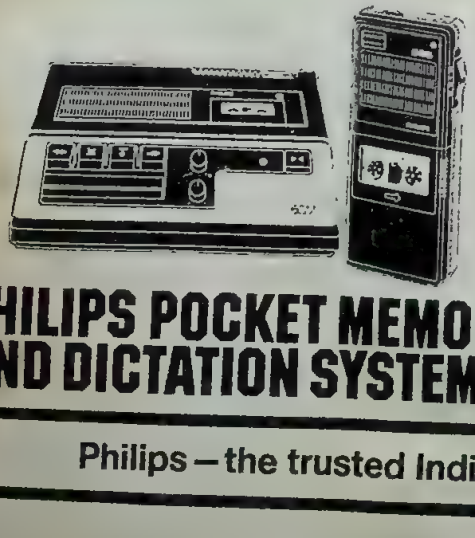
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about the atrocities of the landlords, the police, the forest officials and the Government are big hits too. The reason is obvious enough. The three districts—North Arcot, Dharmapuri and Ramanathapuram—most responsive to the cultural programme are drought-prone, and the people mainly agricultural labourers who are paid pitifully meagre wages—if they find employment at all.

"I get Rs 6 for a hard day's work, and the women get just Rs 2.50," says Perumal, an agricultural worker from Muniyampatti village in Dharmapuri. This is despite the fact that the state Government has fixed the minimum agricultural wages at Rs 8-18 a day, for both men and women, depending on the kind of work. But the average in the districts of North Arcot and Dharmapuri is equally bad: Rs 5 a day for men for 10 hours of hard work, and Rs 2.50 for women.

"For domestic labour, the landlords of our village give a woman just one saree for a whole year's work. They give us no money, not even some gruel. And we can't protest, because we can't afford not to work," wails Theethamma of Sundarampalli village, North Arcot district. Rajagopal, a farm labourer, explains why their position is so tenuous. "When there is work only for 10 people, 20 accost the landlords. So naturally the landlords can afford to be tough about wages." Kandaswamy, a well-to-do landowner of Sundarampalli resents the attempt to paint his class the villains. "How can we pay if the land does not yield us enough?" he asks. He says that due to shortage of water, and diminished fertility of land, the rice yield in his district of North Arcot is half or less that in other districts like Tiruchi and Thanjavur. The farm workers of those districts are better paid, too, getting between Rs 8 and 14 a day.

But the Government is supposed to tackle such problems as well and its ambitious drought relief programmes were initiated for that very purpose. Evidently they haven't touched the fringe of the problem in the three districts. But the excuses of drought and poor yields do not justify the actions of the landlords. Krishnamurthy, a shepherd of Sundarampalli village, complains: "The landlords don't stop with paying us low wages. They also file false police complaints against us." Retorts Subbayan, a landlord: "That is an outrageous lie. These labourers always nurse grievances against us. They are welcome to stage street plays and do whatever propaganda they like, but how can they instigate armed rebellion in these cultural programmes?"



CPI(ML) and RYL activist leaders: spreading revolutionary propaganda

The police also seem to perceive the threat of armed agression in the peaceful cultural shows of the civil rights groups despite the fact that their leaders claim to have abjured violence. "The poor agricultural workers are perfectly at liberty to organise whatever programmes they want, but it is seditious on their part to preach armed revolt to the villagers," says a top police official of North Arcot district.

On the other hand, the police itself faces many allegations that people who were taken into police custody on minor charges died under mysterious circumstances. Some examples:

► Deivamani, a 19-year-old Harijan girl, detained by the police on charges of theft died in Kichipalayam police station in Salem on March 15, 1984. It was dismissed as a case of suicide. But the Government was subsequently forced by the Opposition to appoint an enquiry commission headed by a retired judge of the Madras High Court, R. Nanjappa, to look into the case. The commission said the police version that "Deivamani committed suicide by hanging herself by her saree (was a) false drama to cover up her death at the hands of the policemen."

► Muniyandi, a farm worker of Kanchirangudi in Ramanathapuram district, was arrested under Section 75 of the City Police Act (creating nuisance in public) in April 3, 1984. He was released late at night, and died a few hours later. Dharmaraj, another labourer who was also in a lock-up that evening, told villagers that he had seen the police torture Muniyandi. Dharmaraj has been missing since April 17. The Government has been forced to institute an enquiry into the incident following public protest in the village and a discussion about it in the Legislative Assembly.

► Elumalai of Vallur village near Madras was arrested on February 18, 1984, in connection with a chain-snatching incident. He died in custody the same night. The Government was once more forced to direct an enquiry into the incident.

The ruling AIADMK party too has come in for its share of criticism in encroaching on the civil rights of people. In one incident in Chinnarajakuppam village near Vellore in North Arcot district, some villagers began constructing a small building which blocked the access of the residence of a small farmer, T.M. Gopal. With the help of the OCDR, Gopal has managed to obtain a stay on the construction in the district munsif's court in Gudiyatham. Villagers say AIADMK workers assaulted Gopal, and lodged a police complaint that Gopal and 150 OCDR members attacked them and demolished the library they were building. Gopal and nine OCDR workers were arrested, and the farmer had to remain in custody for four days. Meanwhile, the construction was hurriedly completed: far from being a library, it is now an "MGR Narpani Manram" (a welfare organisation), proudly bearing the two-leaves election symbol of the AIADMK. It was in fact inaugurated by Tamil Nadu Water and Drainage Board Chairman A.M. Raghunathan on July 8 this year. Outraged, the OCDR filed a contempt of

court application in the district munsif's court which had granted a stay on the construction of the building in July.

BUT ON a more general level, the Government has also come under fire for enacting special laws like the Goondas Act, which, civil rights activists, politicians and lawyers fear is just one more way to put the squeeze on any dissenting activity. Already 50 people have been arrested under the act since it came into force two years ago, but what worries the activists most is that practically anyone can be arrested under the orders of the district collector and kept in detention for as long as a year before being produced before the magistrate. "I don't see any need for legislation like this one when existing laws can very well take care of antisocial elements," says senior advocate G. Ramaswamy.

This has prompted the obvious allegations that the Government is using the act against political opponents. "The act is being misused by the MGR Government. MGR had given an assurance in the Assembly that the act would not be used against political opponents, but Nellupettai Cheeni, a DMK worker of Madurai district has been held in jail for the last six months under the act. By no stretch of the imagination is Cheeni a goonda," say DMK MLA Rahman Khan. In Arasampatti village, 25-year-old Manickam a RYL worker has been kept in detention in Salem Central Jail for the past four months after his arrest under the Goondas Act. In nearby Salem, Kuruvai Manickam, a member, as well as Ardhanareeswaran and Mani, two labour leaders with Marxis-Leninist sympathies, have been held under the act.

Tamil Nadu's civil rights record is not particularly impressive. Just last year, there was a big stink about criminal cases for which the police had delayed filing charge-sheets. There were as many as 4.7 lakh such cases in which the first information reports (FIR's) had been pending for over six months. Public criticism of the state of affairs and the consequent pressure on the judiciary caused the Madras High Court to direct magistrates statewide to close all criminal cases for which the police had not filed charge-sheets within six months of making out the FIR's (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1983). The judgement implied that the police had been deliberately keeping cases pending, subjecting the detainees to the torture of uncertainty. "It is the judiciary which is a greater offender in the matter of individual liberties," declares Director-General of Police, K. Mohandas. "Criminal cases drag on in courts for years on end, so how can judges blame the police alone?" he asks. Mohandas complains that the process of investigating a case, gathering evidence and sifting it and filing a charge-sheet is difficult and tedious, and thus delays are therefore inevitable.

Charges and counter-charges about who really is responsible hardly help matters. Meanwhile, as OCDR's Bhakthavathsalam says, the tragedy of Tamil Nadu is that "the fundamental rights of people can be curbed by a head constable under the Tamil Nadu Dramatic Performances Act, by a sub-inspector under the City Police Act, and by a tehsildar under the Criminal Procedure Code. But in all these cases, we have to go to a high court to get these rights restored." If the state is to redeem its reputation, the Government and the police must look at the economic tragedy behind the cultural struggle of the people.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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Rope It Up

Skip away to more stamina and firmer thigh and calf muscles. While skipping, keep your back erect. And land on your toes, with knees slightly bent.

Splashdance

A pleasure way to fitness is swimming. It's excellent for your heart and lungs, general mobility and cardiovascular system. Even your casual back stroke is great exercise. So go ahead, take the plunge. And make waves with your trim figure.



Run Baby Run

Run. And stride away to better endurance and a stronger heart and lungs. Run at a steady pace and with an easy movement. You'll feel all flushed and refreshed.

Put On Your Dancing Shoes

Let the music play on. And dance away to suppleness and flexibility. Don't get tense about doing the right steps. Just flip on a Michael Jackson record. You'll start tap tapping at a scorching pace.



Do The Wheelies

Cycling is great for your legs, pelvic and abdominal muscles.

Use a cycle with straight handlebars. Maybe you won't look so racy, but it's good for your posture. Observe people or the countryside as you pedal by. And have lots of fun!

Muscle Power

Weights are great. It's a myth that they build embarrassing masculine bulges. Instead they give you sleek, supple muscles. So go on, start lifting those dumbbells and muscle your way to a fantastic figure.

Food For Thought

You want to feel great at 40? Then, you better start on the right stuff, right now. Restraining yourself from eating all those sugary, salty, fatty foods, will surely add spice to your life in the long run. Salt increases water content in the body, makes-



Fashions: Sangeeta Chopra.

you flabby and could give you high blood pressure. Eat less sugar and be more of a honey girl. Sugar loves doing unsweet things like decaying your teeth, making you obese and causing you diabetes. But, good old honey is a better sweetener. It is rich in minerals and contains all essential amino acids.

Mealtime Message

Make your meals less meaty and more of 'bhajis', vegetables and salads comprising sprouted 'moong' or 'chana'. Top it off with 'dahi' and fibrous fruits which are great for your digestion. And wash down everything with 8 glasses of water a day. It's a natural skin moisturizer.

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AMBASSADORS

Political Peccadillos

POLITICAL appointees in ambassadorial positions have long been the sufferance of career diplomats. The rules they flout, the extra facilities they obtain and the general *frisson* they create at home and abroad, are regular talking points in New Delhi's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Of course, the hotter the political favourite the more he can get away with. Still, there are unspoken limits to which norms can be stretched in a ministry that prides itself on its values of discretion, lack of ostentation and low-key distribution of political largesse.

Some of these norms have lately come in for a serious battering with the appointment of Homi J.H. Taleyarkhan, former governor in Sikkim, as ambassador to Italy. So brazen and unceasing have been the old Congress party faithful's demands —and so ungrudging their acceptance— that ministry officials are rendered speechless for fear of losing their jobs. But the special dispensations doled out to Taleyarkhan, and the manner in which granted, have caused much disquiet in South Block. Political intervention at the highest level has made Taleyarkhan's current sinecure comfortable to an extent undreamed of in the MEA: he has been allowed to carry with him to Rome not one but three members of his staff from the Raj Bhavan in Sikkim and his entertainment allowance has been increased by as much as four times what his predecessor in office, Jagdish Ajmani was sanctioned for the same job.

What is even more astounding about Taleyarkhan's determined if ignominious bid to cadge favours is the blatantly nepotistic style in which he obtained them, browbeating at least three secretaries to the Government and two cabinet ministers. In a personal letter dated March 23 this year, he requested the then defence minister R.Venkataraman to release his former ADC in Gangtok, Captain A.S. Thapa, to go as comptroller of his household in Rome, as "Madam" and "Narasimhaji" (the prime minister and foreign minister respectively) had allowed him to go. Although ambassadors are not allowed comptrollers for their households abroad and the Defence Secretary S.M. Ghosh had already twice rejected Taleyarkhan's written requests, the ambassador-designate got his way. In a postscript to the same letter, Taleyarkhan further requested that Thapa's wife (designated honorary comptroller of his household) needed to go abroad as she was suffering from "eye trouble". Thanks to his boss's bullying ways Captain Thapa is now firmly ensconced in the Rome Embassy as second secretary, after further efforts were made by Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra to elevate his designation from third to second secretary, thereby accommodating a substantial increase in foreign allowance. An MEA proposal to designate Captain Thapa as military attache in an effort to transfer the onus of his posting to the Defence Ministry (which selects military attaches for embassies) was turned down, the ministry arguing that such jobs were strictly awarded on merit and, in any case, their selection was computerised. The MEA, as a result, was forced to "ex-cadre" the job of a second secretary, that is, withhold it from a foreign service candidate who would have normally filled it.



The special dispensations doled out to Taleyarkhan, and the manner in which granted, have caused much disquiet in South Block.

The Thapa berth assured, Taleyarkhan found other jobs for his boys from Raj Bhavan. K.S. Narayanaswamy, his private secretary in Gangtok, continues to be his private secretary in Rome. This is not abnormal practice, were it not for the fact that Narayanaswamy has been on deputation from the Education Ministry, for nine years. Government rules for officials on deputation restrict their stay afield for three years, with a maximum extension of one year. Taleyarkhan's insistence on keeping Narayanaswamy in Gangtok, then carting him off to Rome is an unheard of example. It was only achieved when Rasgotra wrote to U.C. Aggarwal, secretary in the personnel department of the Home Ministry, to allow Narayanaswamy another extension.

In addition, Taleyarkhan managed to take along with him Mahinder Singh of the CRPF (also from Raj Bhavan) as security guard for his residence in Rome. The job normally goes to a policeman of constable rank; since Singh is a sub-inspector, another MEA job in Rome, of assistant, had to be ex-cadred. These three appointments will cost MEA about Rs 2.5 lakh a year.

Earlier this year, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee wrote to the foreign minister asking that, for reasons of economy, no politically-appointed ambassador should be allowed to take more than one assistant of his choice (career diplomats cannot even exercise that choice). That Taleyarkhan should take two or three people is testimony to some ambassdors being more equal than others.

His credentials for this are borne out by his career graph in the Congress party: he has served both as vice-president of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee and general secretary of the Congress Legislature Party in Maharashtra; in 1980, he was plucked from chairmanship of the Maharashtra State Financial Corporation to be planted as governor in Sikkim where he accomplished the crowning achievement of his career: he dismissed the popular Nar Bahadur Bhandari ministry (INDIA TODAY, June 15,) and set a precedent for other Congress take-over bids. In August, he took up his position in Rome where gratitude for his accomplishments as a loyal party soldier was expressed not only in the entourage of retainers but also in the unprecedented hiking up of his allowances.

The job of ambassador in Italy carries a monthly foreign allowance of Rs 12,965 a figure Ajmani quietly managed on. Taleyarkhan demanded that it be upped to Rs 20,000 a month. After considerable pestering, the MEA raised his allowance to a monthly Rs 16,500. Not content, Taleyarkhan insisted that his entertainment allowance—fixed at Rs 2,540 a month—also be raised. After extensive correspondence, the MEA acceded not one but two substantive raises, nearly quadrupling the sum to Rs 9,000 a month.

For all that, Taleyarkhan is a patently bad bargain. The price to be paid for the lowering of MEA's upright standards, the demoralisation wreaked in bureaucratic circles by throwing weight about, and the concessions extracted by one man misusing his reputation, is heavy indeed.

—SUNIL SETHI

TIRING WAIT

THE SALE of Dunlop India is still not over, with unexpected delays at the London end holding up a final decision on the bid made some months ago by industrialist R.P. Goenka. The board of Dunlop Holdings in UK has repeatedly postponed a decision, apparently because of conflicting pressures from different merchant bankers, and rival Indian business houses have used the delay to renew their efforts at grabbing the company. The Dunlop Holdings board is due to meet again in mid-October, when a final decision is expected to be made. Those waiting for the announcement from London include not just Goenka but also the Tatas, Birlas and Singhanias. This last group has been denying that it has any interest in acquiring Dunlop, but the corporate grape-vine says otherwise.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THE KOTHARIS have entered into collaboration with General Foods of the US to manufacture an entire range of processed foods, including freeze-dried coffee, powdered beverages and protein-rich foods. The collaboration was signed some time ago, but plans have now got finalised regarding the product lines and production quantities which are to be undertaken by a new company formed for the purpose, Kothari General Foods Corporation. As much as 60 per cent of the freeze-dried coffee that is planned to be produced will be exported. A pilot plant in Hassan, Karnataka, is meanwhile turning out samples of a cold drink mix priced at 40 paise. Kothari General Foods will have an equity capital of Rs 40 crore, of which one-third each will be contributed by the Kotharis and General Foods, and the rest offered to the public.

A STEP BACKWARD

WHILE a great many companies are rushing into the boom area of processed foods, the Madras-based Tube Investments (TI) group is going one step backward, into unprocessed foods. Convinced that many plantation-based industries are not the dying entities they are often made out to be (in tea, for example, the sharp increase in domestic consumption ensures a profitable future), the group plans to move into agriculture-related fields in a big way, and is looking at cardamom as one profitable possibility.

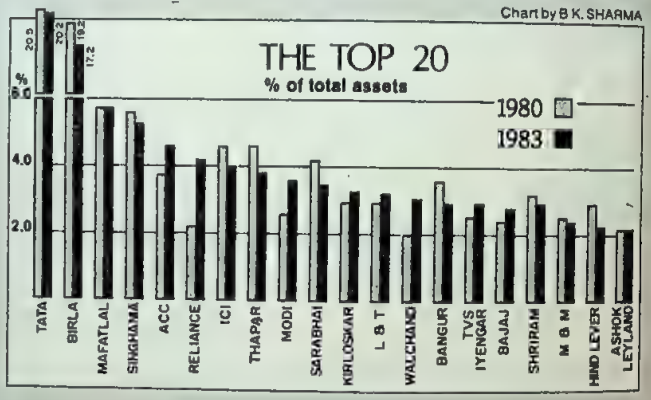
Meanwhile, the group's acquisition of the overseas shareholdings of EID Parry has indirectly given it control of a British trade and distribution firm. The group joins the select band of Indians running companies in the West. The Delhi-based Eicher group is already running Eicher of Germany.

NEW PASTURES

JOKAI India, the tea company controlled by Ranjit Sethia, is preparing plans for a major diversification programme aimed at entering new fields of business. The possibilities open to the company are being studied by A.N. Haksar, chairman emeritus of ITC who is also chairman of Jokai India. Haksar has started preliminary exercises on two areas that he had once considered pushing ITC into: construction materials and electronics. But while ITC had tried to enter the cement business, Jokai India is looking at the possibility of producing gypsum particle boards. Earlier, ITC had considered entering the packaged tea business by selling tea bought from Jokai India, but the deal was not followed through.

DRIVING SEAT

AUTOMOBILES and related industries seem to offer the biggest growth potential for the large industrial houses. Among the top 20 business houses listed recently by a financial paper, most of those who registered better-than-average increases in assets since 1980 belonged to the automobiles or related engineering sectors: Bajaj, TVS

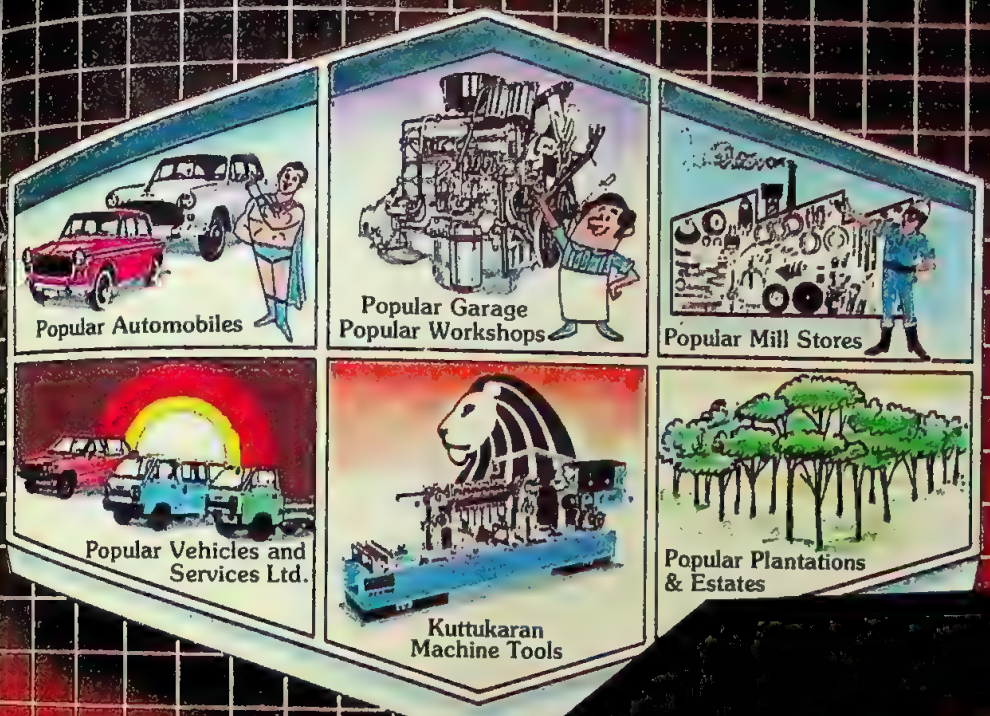


Iyengar, Walchand and Kirloskar. Two others in this area who matched the average rate of asset growth were Ashok Leyland and Mahindra & Mahindra. In comparison, the business houses which saw lower-than-average asset growth since 1980 were Hindustan Lever, Shriram, Bangur, Sarabhai, Thapar, ICI and Birla.

IN THE DOCK

THE FLOATING dry dock that Escorts acquired a year ago has sailed into a series of hurdles. The dry dock is the first of its kind in the country, but initially ran into a problem about its location in the Nhava Sheva port near Bombay, and then into a second one concerning the pilots who would help it function (because the pilots belong to the neighbouring Bombay port). These plus some other problems rendered the dry dock idle for most of the first half of 1984, and since last December it has been employed for less than 10 days. In the process, the Rs 20 crore investment has already resulted in a loss of over Rs 4 crore, partly neutralising the profits made by Escorts in its other fields of operation. Company spokesmen say that substantial business is now likely to come from the Soviet Union's ships, but in a few months' time a fresh decision will have to be taken by the Government about the floating dry dock continuing to locate itself in the Nhava-Sheva port.

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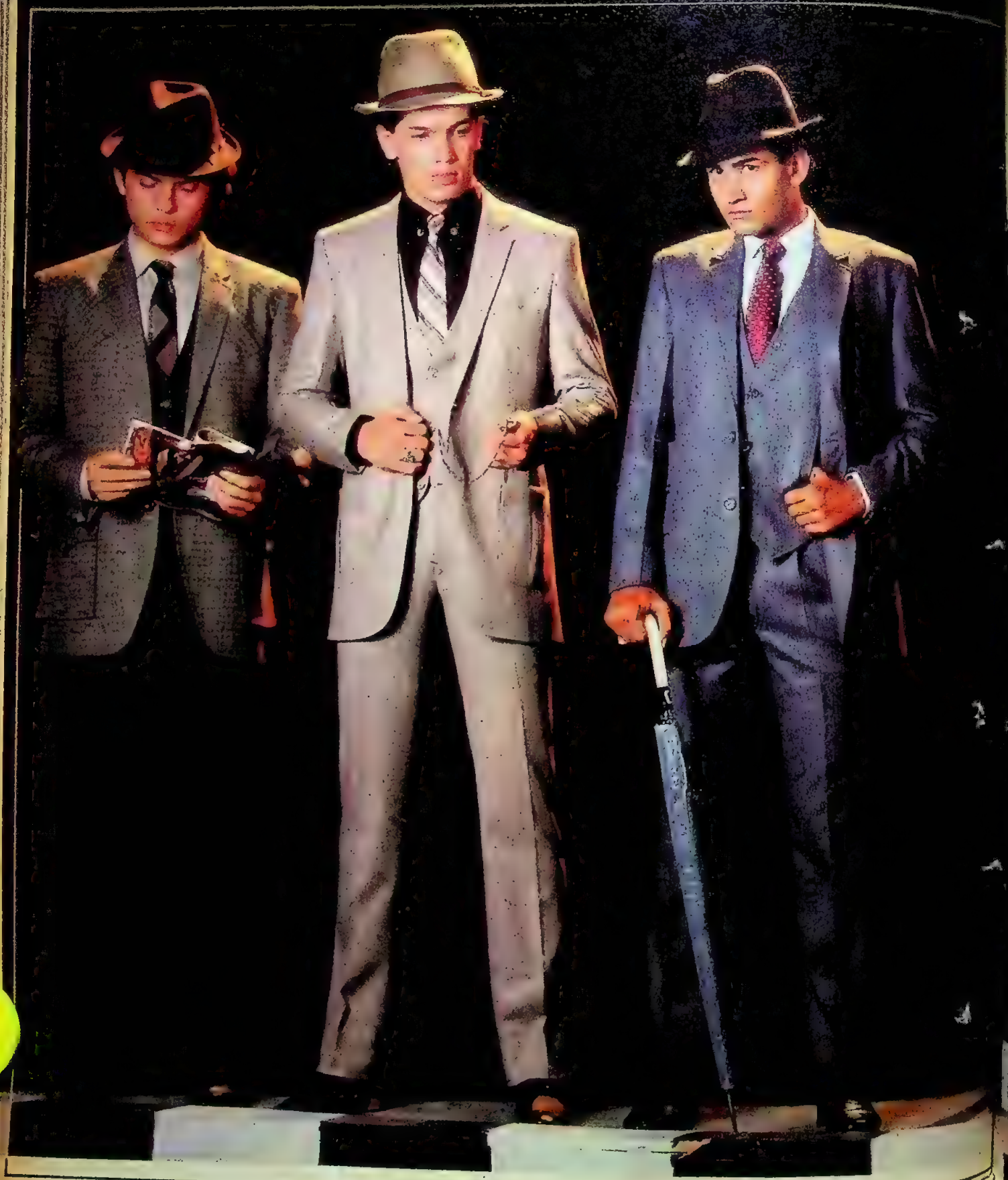
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ART 382



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...the four lit up her life.


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INTERNATIONAL FINANCE

The Debt Debate



IT'S ALL over bar the shouting. The World Bank and the IMF met in Washington last month and made the obligatory cooing noises before an audience of 10,000 officials, economists and journalists who came from all over the world to attend the annual two-day jamboree which, according to a lynx-eyed reporter of our own UNI, cost the bank and its members over Rs 2.5 crore for the bash. For an organisation that makes so much noise about poverty, that is really something.

I have before me two reports which were obviously timed to coincide with the Washington meeting. One is a report on the need for reform of the international monetary and financial system by a group of experts appointed by Mrs Indira Gandhi in her capacity as the chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and is titled "Directions for Reforms". The other report, "The Debt Crisis and the World Economy", deals with the same problem and is prepared by a similar panel set up by the Commonwealth summit meeting in New Delhi last November.

Both reports emphasise a danger of world-wide disruption if interest payments due on the debts of the major developing countries are not paid. That risk is not only to the developing countries that may default but equally to the leading international banks and thus to the world financial system itself. In effect, what these experts are saying is also what their governments are saying: "We are broke. We do not have money to pay interest on the loans taken from you unless you buy more from us or give us more cash to tide over. If you don't and we default on the interest payments, your banks will go broke too and that will not only mess up your economy but your governments also. For God's sake, pay up or we both go bust."

I am not surprised that this kind of argument does not cut much ice either with President Reagan or Margaret Thatcher. During my recent tour of Europe, I found that it did not cut much ice with the common man either. The rich countries—or at least a fairly large and vocal section of population in these countries—do not think that they are responsible for the present indebtedness of the borrower countries nor do they think that a radical reform of the present international monetary system is either called for or will help solve the basic problem of poverty and indebtedness. Their argument runs something like this:

► When the money was borrowed, it was for the purpose of creating productive assets. Were these assets really created and, if so, what has gone wrong and why have the poor remained poor or become



poorer, and the rich of these countries become richer?

► There are reports that in the case of countries like Brazil, Argentina and others, a good deal of the money has found its way into Swiss accounts of powerful private interests which rule these countries and who have syphoned off the booty. Stories of corruption in high places and of amassing of vast fortunes by the ruling classes, and sometimes ruling families as in the Philippines, are as familiar in Paris and London as in the back streets of Manila and Karachi.

There are also few buyers of the familiar argument that it is the Bretton Woods system of stable exchange rates that was responsible in a large measure for the high levels of prosperity achieved by most countries of the free world after World War II. Actually, it is the other way round, they say. It is the high rates of economic and industrial growth brought about by continuing innovation and modernisation that were responsible for the maintenance of a stable world financial system. When following the sharp escalation in oil prices, the economic system faltered and temporarily broke down, the financial and monetary system too broke down. By insisting on a radical reform of the latter instead of addressing themselves to the more relevant structural problems of growth and development, the spokesmen of the poor countries are making the mistake of putting the cart before the horse, the argument goes.

In India, the growth model broke down way back in 1966, long before the oil prices started going up, and more than a decade before the fixed exchange rates were abolished. The nexus—a favourite term of our reformwallas—between India's growth and the international financial climate is so thin as to be almost invisible. India can tot up a steady growth rate of over 7 per cent a year if it can put its economic house in order, without an additional cent from the World Bank. And I suspect that there are quite a few other debt-ridden countries of the Third World in much the same boat.

Success in the development game is a matter of saving and thrift, investment and discipline, diligence and individual effort—qualities and attributes that differentiate a growth-oriented society from a stagnant one, and within the same society, one particular class from another. Has anyone ever pondered why the Marwaris and the Banias do or have done so well in India, though their access to what our experts would refer to as a financial system is, in theory, no better than that of other classes or castes? As late as 1850, that is, slightly over a century ago, the per capita income of Latin America was not much different from that of the US. The populations were similar and both continents were mainly agricultural. But within less than a half a century, the US had surged forward and Latin America had been reduced to a continent of soldiers, aristocrats and priests but, as Jonathan Power, an American writer says, not one of development. It is also not true that underdevelopment in Latin America is a consequence of exploitation by the US. US investment in Latin America is less than 1 per cent of its GNP.

I would have liked our experts, particularly the NAM experts, to have dwelt on these factors rather than pointing fingers at that familiar bugbear, the international monetary system, which seems such a handy substitute for the old colonial system. By all means try and change the system but don't blame someone else for our misfortunes. Forget North South, forget Bretton Woods, and get down to the job of growing two ears of corn where one grew before—a Biblical injunction that is as valid today as it was two millenia ago. We are our own worst enemies—and also, thank God, our own best friends.

DCM

War of Succession

THE BATTLE for succession is on in DCM, the Rs 500 crore textile, fertiliser and chemical giant that has been in the news for close to two years because of the stock market raid mounted by the London-based Swraj Paul.The two brothers who have run the company for 20 years—Chairman and Managing Director Bharat Ram, 70, and Managing Director Charat Ram, 67—have not seen eye to eye for a long time, and the company's top management has as a result been split down the middle.But the succession issue could be the most crucial of them all and the rift at the top on this question may well present Swraj Paul with the chance that he has been looking for to move into the company.

The ball was set rolling by Bharat Ram three months ago.In a surprise move at the last meeting of the company's board in late July, Bharat Ram proposed that both he and Charat Ram retire at the end of their present tenures, in March next year.Bharat Ram also proposed that their places be taken by the next generation in the Shriram family, Bansi Dhar, 54, and Vinay Bharat Ram, 48. Bansi Dhar is the son of the late Lala Shriram's oldest son Murli Dhar (who died in an air crash in 1949) and is now DCM's joint managing director.Vinay Bharat Ram is Bharat Ram's oldest son and is now deputy managing director of the company (*see family tree*).

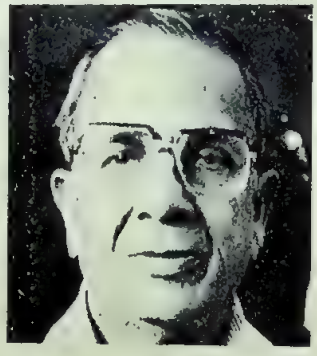
Apparently caught unprepared by Bharat Ram's move, Charat Ram is preparing a counter-proposal that will be presented to the board at its next meeting, on October 18.Charat Ram has said that only Bharat Ram should leave next March, Charat Ram himself should stay on for another three years (till he turns 70) as chairman and managing director, and Bansi Dhar should be promoted now to additional managing director and groomed to succeed Charat Ram.The practice of having two managing directors should be given up, and Vinay Bharat Ram should be designated joint managing director.

What view the board will take on the matter can only be speculated on just now. Charat Ram is more or less isolated on the board, the majority of which backs Bharat Ram.But the board also has on it nominees of the major public sector financial institutions, who own 42 per cent of the company's shares.Their view on the matter could therefore be crucial, and Charat Ram's only hope of getting his way is if the institutions take a decisive stand and back him in the tussle.

Whether the institutions will oblige, or just swim with the Bharat Ram tide, or (and this is the big question) use the rift over the succession issue to bring Swraj Paul or his nominee on to the DCM board, now remains to be seen.Paul has bought a substantial stake in the company, but the board has so far refused to register his shares. But the succession tussle could change all that.



HARI OM GULATI



HARI OM GULATI



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



(Clockwise from top left) Bharat Ram, Charat Ram, Vinay Bharat Ram, Bansi Dhar: crucial moves

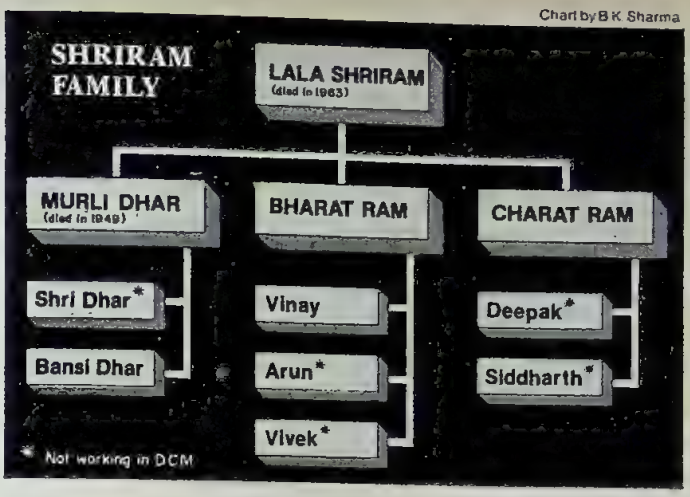
Neither Bharat Ram nor Charat Ram, however, is thinking of this at the moment.Bharat Ram clearly sees the issue as an orderly succession, with one generation giving way to the next in a company that is not a high-flier but not a disaster story either. But Charat Ram seems convinced that DCM is in deep trouble, that in the 20 years of Bharat Ram's tenure at the top the company has performed miserably, that it is already a sick unit and that if nothing is done quickly to set matters right the company will soon sink under its own weight.In opposing Vinay Bharat Ram's elevation to the post of managing director, he is also casting a vote of no-confidence in Bharat Ram's oldest son.

Only well-informed—and neutral—insiders can say who is right and who is wrong.But there is little doubt that DCM has not done well in the last decade.The company has slipped in the country's corporate asset rankings (though it still ranks fourth in sales), its share market value before Swraj Paul started buying was far from flattering, and it has not been able to grasp growth opportunities in the way that other companies have.In the process, the company's profits have stagnated for over a decade despite investment almost trebling during the period.So the rate of return on investment has taken a steep plunge, from 19 per cent in 1969-70 to an estimated 8 per cent last year.During 1982-83, the company in fact incurred a loss of Rs 2 crore, but showed a profit of Rs 13 crore by changing the calculation of depreciation—a bit of financial jugglery that the sharp-eyed were quick to spot.

This year, in a move that suggests financial problems of a major order, the company's board has approved a deficit of Rs 29 crore, a stupendous figure that threatens to grow bigger. And the company has been borrowing from the market to meet short-term financial needs.A Rs 15 crore debenture issue three years ago is now to be followed up by a second issue of the same size, while the board has also approved borrowings of up to Rs 5 crore from the inter-corporate market.The interest burden on these will total over Rs 5 crore, and in a few years' time the debentures will have to be bought back, causing a further financial outgo.With profits hovering around Rs 15 crore, there is the danger that the company will find all its surpluses eaten up and little left to give out to shareholders in the form of dividends—unless profitability improves dramatically.

This scenario may be unwarrantedly bleak, and yet it may not.But it is central to Charat Ram's stand on the succession issue. He has been saying for years that the

Chart by B K Sharma



divisions under his control have been making most of the money for the company, only to find the surpluses being eaten up by the divisions under Bharat Ram's control. Charat Ram and Bansi Dhar, who works under him, run the company's fertiliser, chemicals and sugar divisions, and their track record is exemplary.Shriram Fertiliser has a capacity utilisation record of over 90 per cent, which is one of the highest, if not the highest, in the industry.The two sugar factories at Daurala and Mawana have an excellent record of efficiency and are among the most profitable units in the industry.And the chemicals division is a veritable goldmine.Between these three, the profits in a year add up to Rs 15 crore or more.In contrast, Bharat Ram's divisions incurred a loss last year of around Rs 5 crore, and Charat Ram clearly intends to use this to drive his point that Bharat Ram must go and that Charat Ram's leadership is needed at the top for an interim period to set the company's total operations right.

BUT THE comparison between the two managing directors' track records is affected crucially by the poor performance of the textiles division, which Charat Ram controls.This incurs an annual loss of between Rs 7 crore and Rs 10 crore.Two of the company's five textile mills—Hissar Textiles and Swatantra Bharat Mills— were closed down earlier this year, and may now be sold off.One or two others are also losing money, and the only money-spinner is Hindon Mills.

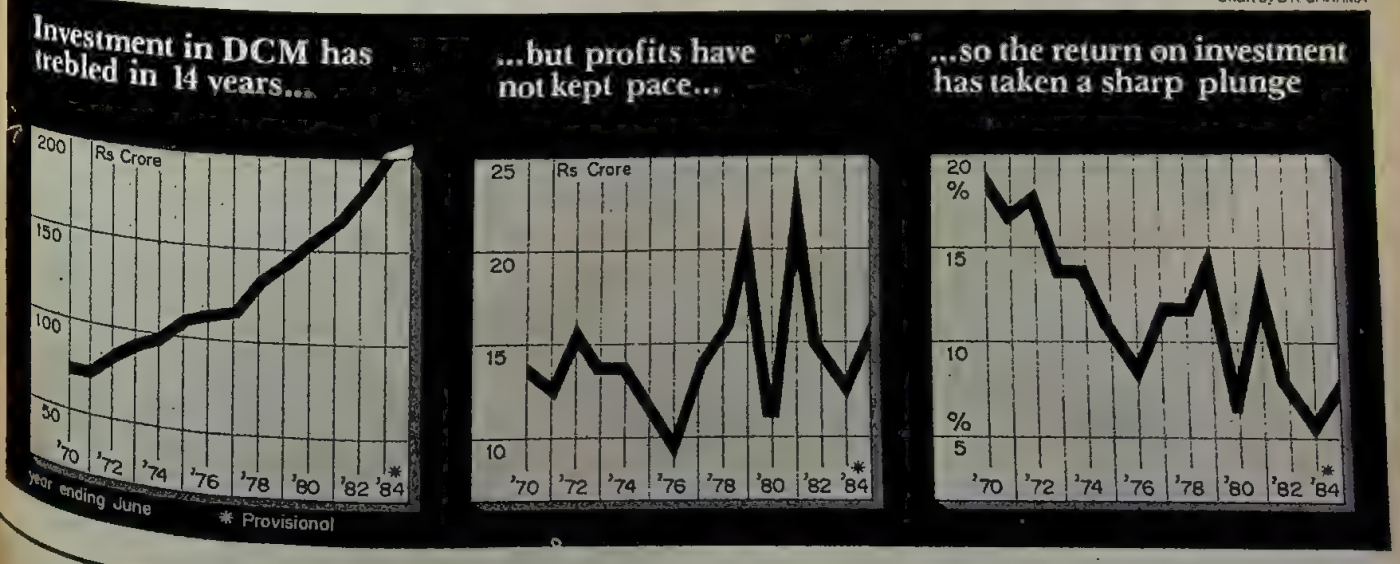
Those speaking in defence of Bharat Ram's divisions argue that if textiles are taken out of consideration on the ground that the problems here reflect the general problems of the industry as a whole, Bharat Ram does not have a bad record. His two other divisions, both directly under the control of Vinay Bharat Ram, have been making money.The foundry division and the data products division have been making profits of around Rs 2 crore.It is also pointed out in Bharat Ram's defence that he has had the sagacity to diversify operations by floating new companies. One is Shriram Fibres, selected a few months ago by *The Economic Times* as one of the best run mini-giants in the country. The other is the newly floated DCM-Toyota, which has managed to sign up a prestigious collaboration with Toyota of Japan and floated a successful share issue. The two companies are run by Bharat Ram's younger sons, Arun and Vivek.

It is also argued that Charat Ram cannot take credit for the good handling of the sugar and chemicals divisions.Company spokesmen, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that the credit for these two divisions' performance should go to Bansi Dhar, who has therefore been proposed by Bharat Ram as the company's next chairman and managing director. Charat Ram, it is argued, has been directly managing only the fertiliser division, which suffered a loss in 1981-82.These arguments are then marshalled to back the logic of Bharat Ram's succession proposal:Charat Ram should retire since he is 67 years old, and Bansi Dhar's excellent track record justifies his promotion to the top slot in the company.

In this welter of assessments and counter-assessments that are offered to support the two conflicting succession plans placed before the company board, it is also argued that neither Bharat Ram nor Vinay Bharat Ram can escape responsibility for the poor performance of the textile mills. Their critics refer to a damning report on the textiles division submitted a few years ago by a consultancy firm. This said the division had lost its sense of direction, that its top management was bewildered and panicky, and that there had been far too frequent changes in the division's organisational and managerial structure.This report, it is argued, is a direct commentary on Vinay Bharat Ram's managerial capability. And, it is said, there was one brief interlude in 1977 when Bansi Dhar was given charge of some of the textile mills.The general opinion seems to be that Bansi Dhar had been setting the units straight when Bharat Ram inexplicably took the mills away from him and handed them back to Vinay Bharat Ram and an executive director, B.D. Pathak.

There seems no way of reconciling these conflicting viewpoints, and the crucial issues now are whether Charat

Chart by B K SHARMA



Ram will be asked to leave against his will next March, and whether Vinay Bharat Ram will be promoted to the rank of managing director.

These two issues reveal the deep schisms within the family that has been running the company for decades.There is now an almost total lack of trust between Bharat Ram and Charat Ram, and their different moves reflect these all too clearly. Five years ago, for instance, when their terms as managing directors came up for renewal, Charat Ram proposed greater responsibility for himself in the company, and Bharat Ram responded by suggesting to the board that there should be only one managing director, instead of two. Though he did not say so, he clearly intended that Charat Ram should not continue as managing director. Today, the boot is on the other foot. Now it is Charat Ram's turn to propose that there should be only one managing director (himself), while Bharat Ram is now arguing that there should continue to be two managing directors (because otherwise his own son loses out in the succession).

This conflict at the top has also affected the company's expansion and investment proposals. The DCM-Toyota project (being managed by Bharat Ram's youngest son Vivek) was stymied for some time because Charat Ram adopted stalling tactics, and Bharat Ram is now repaying him in the same coin by not okaying the proposal to go in for a giant fertiliser plant, pleading lack of money (which is a fact).

The division at the top also affected the company's moves in fighting off the Swraj Paul attack.Bharat Ram was keen to go to court along with Escorts, but Charat Ram refused to go along. And he is known to have told friends that this will be the one factor that can now help keep the company in the family's hands.Nevertheless, he is critical of Bharat Ram's handling of the situation, blaming him for the fact that most government functionaries, all the financial institutions and a large body of share investors are now completely antagonistic to the company.

ACCORDING to the corporate grapevine, Charat Ram even believes that Swraj Paul will manage the company better than either Bharat Ram or Vinay Bharat Ram. And on the succession issue, he is believed to be of the opinion that even if Bansi Dhar is made chairman and managing director, Bharat Ram will ensure that the majority on the board will back Vinay Bharat Ram, thereby isolating and neutralising Bansi Dhar.

Bansi Dhar himself, say senior company officials, is ambivalent on the issue. He can hardly oppose a resolution that offers him the top slot, but he has worked most of his years under Charat Ram's guidance, and may not be happy to see Charat Ram being made to leave the company against his will.

In the final analysis, however, it will be the non-family members of the company board who will decide the issue.More specifically, the financial institutions will be the key players in the action. They are the company's most important shareholders, and neither Bharat Ram nor Charat Ram is in a position to flout their wishes without asking for serious trouble. Bharat Ram has one advantage here: his youngest son Vivek is a close friend of Rajiv Gandhi, who might possibly be persuaded to put in a good word with the institutions. But judging by the institutions' record in Escorts, which is also under stock market attack by Swraj Paul, it is just as possible that they will try to introduce the joker in the pack: Swraj Paul.

—T.N. NINAN

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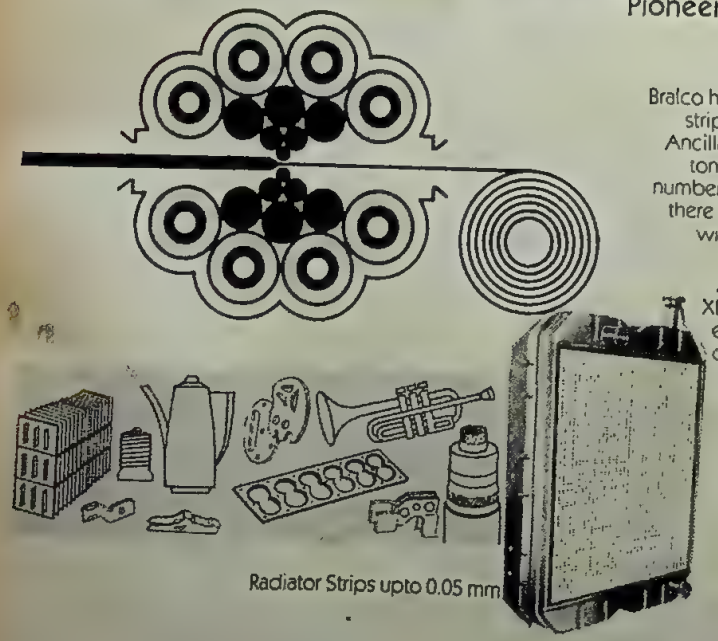
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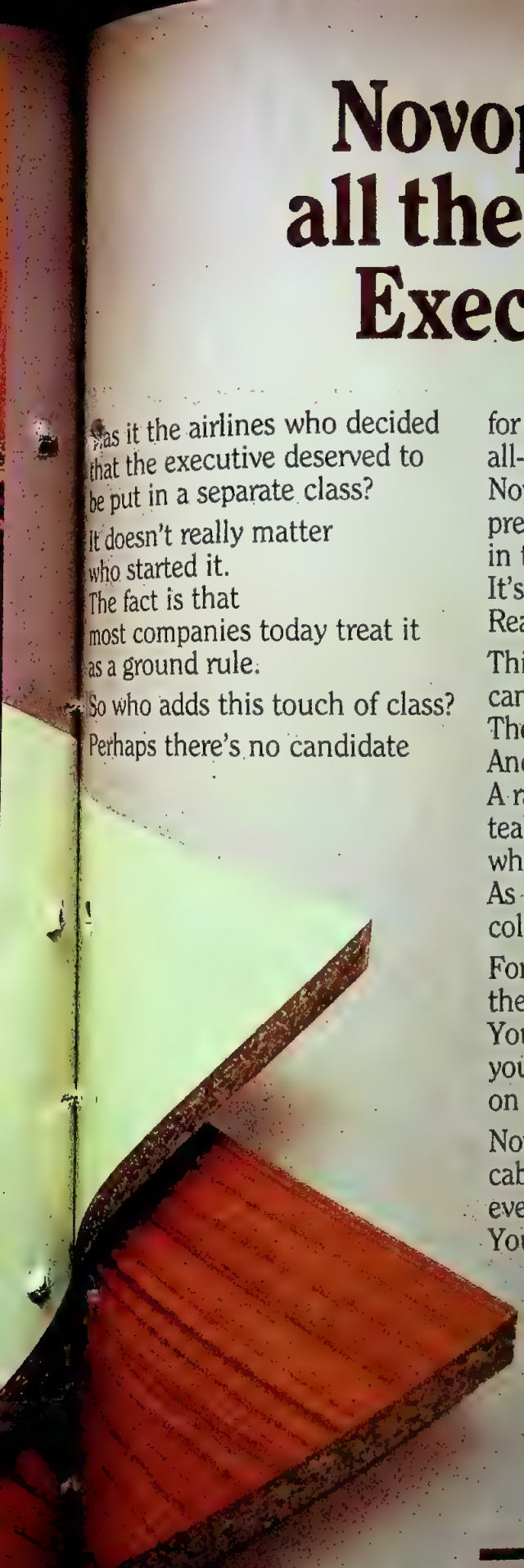
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SWADESHI POLYTEX

A Crucial Confrontation

IT IS the stuff of high drama—brothers battling it out to control a Rs 60 crore company, shareholders' meetings galore (over five of them this year alone) and court room wars. Now the longest-fought corporate battle in recent times is poised to take a decisive turn in the next few days.

Seven years of protracted legal manoeuvring, filibustering and acrimonious sniping will come to the boil when a special leave petition filed by five small shareholders of Swadeshi Polytex comes up for hearing before the Supreme Court. On the petition's fate largely hangs the question of who will control Swadeshi Polytex—Sitaram Jaipuria, 58, now in the driver's seat, or foster brother Rajaram Jaipuria, 50, chairman and managing director of Swadeshi Cotton Mills. The two have been slugging it out since 1977 to gain control of the company.

Control hinges on two key factors: the stand of the financial institutions, and the outcome of the petition. The institutions hold 15 per cent of the total Swadeshi Polytex equity of 39 lakh, while the Rajaram Jaipuria side has 36 per cent, including 10 per cent shares whose voting rights are the subject of dispute before the Supreme Court. Clubbed together, they make for a majority of 51 per cent. The remaining shares are held by Sitaram Jaipuria—less than one per cent, his brother avers, though stockbrokers place it now at 9-10 per cent—and the public. The support of the financial institutions is therefore crucial. They had all along backed Sitaram Jaipuria to the hilt but are widely believed to have now switched sides.

The second factor central to controlling Swadeshi Polytex is the issue before the court: whether the voting rights of 10 lakh Swadeshi Polytex shares, held by Swadeshi Cotton, can be exercised by the directors of Swadeshi Cotton (read Rajaram Jaipuria). Swadeshi Polytex was promoted by Swadeshi Cotton in 1970, and the latter's block of shares represents almost a fourth of Swadeshi Polytex equity. The five small shareholders argue that the voting rights cannot be exercised by the directors of Swadeshi Cotton since six Swadeshi Cotton Mills were taken over by the Government in 1978. But a Swadeshi Cotton spokesman points out that only the mills were taken over and not the company itself, so that the voting rights can be exercised—a position upheld earlier by the Allahabad High Court.

Also before the court are the results of the voting on a resolution seeking to oust three Swadeshi Polytex directors. The Supreme Court had ordered the outcome of the poll, held at the extraordinary general meeting of the company on September 24, to be placed on ice.

The court may or may not admit the petition; it could go either way, says S. Jagannathan, former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and an Industrial Finance Corporation of India nominee on the Swadeshi Polytex board. "The petition was not dismissed summarily" at the preliminary held by the Supreme Court on September 14, Jagannathan points out. Others, however, argue that no weighty questions of law are involved, and forecast that it will be shot down by the court.



Rajaram



Sitaram

On the shareholders' petition largely hangs the question of who will control Swadeshi Polytex —Sitaram or his foster brother Rajaram Jaipuria.

It they are right, that will herald victory for Rajaram Jaipuria and signal a boardroom shuffle at Swadeshi Polytex if the institutions oblige. Out will go Sitaram's son Ashok Jaipuria and directors B.M. Kaul and P.B. Menon (Sitaram Jaipuria's fate will be decided by the recast board which alone has the power to remove the managing director). In will come Rajaram Jaipuria, industrialist Sitaram Singhania of Lohia Machines, and former civil servant R.D. Thapar.

But with institutional support an iffy question, the warring parties have been hedging their bets by tapping the stock-market. Share broker Prakash Jusroi, who bought large numbers of Swadeshi Polytex shares on behalf of an industrialist and others whom he declines to name, says, "Both sides were involved in buying from the market, though there has been no buying for 8-9 months."

Stockbroker B.D. Agarwal adds that at least three lakh Swadeshi Polytex shares were bought over a year ago at an average price of Rs 30 by companies fronting for others. "Rumours were afloat in the market that shares were bought on behalf of Sitaram Singhania," says Agarwal. But Singhania, whose daughter is married to Rajaram Jaipuria's son, denies having invested in Swadeshi Polytex. 'I have no financial stake in the company," he says.

Meanwhile, Rajaram Jaipuria let loose a fresh broadside at his brother last fortnight. In a notice served on the board of Swadeshi Polytex, Swadeshi Cotton warned board members that "each one of them will be held responsible and liable for the loss to the company caused by a series of mala fide transactions". The notice cites the sale of a flat towned by the company in Bombay, and the transfer of two office premises in the capital and of company vehicles to some Sitaram Jaipuria's associates at "throwaway prices". But that was clearly part of a continuing strategy in a war of nerves designed to sustain the pressure on the opposition, for the Swadeshi Cotton managing director admits, "We're not saying that the flat has been sold. There are rumours to this effect and they may be inflated."

The latest allegations cap a series of charges levelled at the Swadeshi Polytex management over the last few months. They include mismanagement, capacity underutilisation and delays in implementing a letter of intent to double capacity—all of which the Swadeshi Polytex management has publicly contested. The company has been regularly paying dividends since 1976, and annual profits have averaged Rs 1.5 crore.

What emerges from this welter of blasts and counter-blasts is that Sitaram Jaipuria is unlikely to go down without putting up a fight. If Sitaram Jaipuria loses this round in court and in the shareholders' voting because the financial institutions desert him, the option of questioning their role in court remains open to him. The immediate battle for Swadeshi Polytex may soon end, but the war may not be quite over yet.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

ENFIELD INDIA

New Option



Enfield factory at Ranipet and (inset) Zundapp in West Germany

WHEN business partners go bankrupt is it a setback or an opportunity? The Madras-based motorcycle manufacturer, Enfield India, thinks the latter. And as a result, it just might end up running a two-wheeler factory in faraway West Germany.

Two years ago, Enfield signed up a collaboration agreement with Zundapp Werke Ltd of Munich for producing four new two-wheeler models in India, ranging from a 50 cc moped to a 163 cc motorcycle racer. Enfield spokesmen say they knew even then that Zundapp was in trouble: labour costs were high, rival Japanese products were being sold as much as 30 per cent cheaper, and sooner or later the crunch would come. But Enfield felt that the sturdy German machines would be better suited for India's rough road conditions than the more lightly-built Japanese products, and went ahead with its collaboration anyway.

Last month, the crunch came—earlier than expected. Zundapp formally declared itself bankrupt in a West German court, which then appointed a receiver to work out whether the plant should be shut down, sold or refurbished and then either run directly or sold as a going concern.

This bit of news made headlines in both Germany and India but Enfield Chairman and Managing Director, S. Viswanathan, appeared completely unfazed and talked confidently of turning the setback into a business opportunity. For one thing, he said, Enfield had already ensured that it had got all the technical support it required from Zundapp for designs, drawings, inspection schedules, material specifications, test standards and above all components for all its new models. And 16 Enfield staffers had already been trained by Zundapp well before the bankruptcy.

If these factors helped protect Enfield's projects from the fall-out of Zundapp's bankruptcy, Viswanathan said he hopes to go one better, by either shifting all or part of the Zundapp factory to India. Alternatively, he will run the company in Germany, by partly using components and vehicles exported from Enfield's factory at Ranipet, in Tamil Nadu's North Arcot district. Said Viswanathan: "We haven't decided which course to take; we are keeping our options open."

In fact, Enfield had submitted its proposal as early as July, when Zundapp first gave its notice of possible closure. But



Enfield's Viswanathan, while keeping options open, leaves little room for doubt that the Madras-based company is about to benefit from an industrial closure in faraway Munich.

there were two rival bids from Pakistan and Iran, and no decision was taken. However, Enfield seems to be the only serious contender, essentially because it is acquainted with Zundapp's working.

Left to himself, Viswanathan would probably prefer to merely acquire some of Zundapp's machinery and equipment, and he sees two advantages in this. One, Enfield will automatically get much of the technology for a new 80 cc motorcycle and a 50 cc scooter turned out recently by Zundapp and received well in the market. Two, it will help sharply reduce the cost of doubling the production capacity that Enfield has been planning.

The company presently has a capacity to turn out 50,000 vehicles annually, and wants to raise this to one lakh. The expansion was expected to cost Rs 16 crore, but importing all the equipment from Zundapp's closed Munich factory will cost no more than Rs 10 crore. Also saved is the royalty that Enfield would have had to pay to Zundapp on its sales, estimated at Rs 5 crore. And the entire German company can be acquired for a song, since its total share capital is no more than Rs 4 crore.

Which of these various options will finally materialise remains to be seen. Acquiring the German company and running it involves an outgo of foreign exchange initially, which the Government will have to approve. This is not unprecedented: Vikram Lall of Eicher Goodearth in India has been setting right the parent Eicher Tracktoren in Germany (INDIA TODAY, March 31). Running Zundapp should not be too daunting a proposition either. The company had a production capacity of no more than one lakh, and production was down to 40,000 before the company's closure. This is not out of line with Enfield's own scale of work. And the Government may allow more such ventures to help build industrial image abroad.

But shifting the Zundapp machinery to Ranipet might turn out to be more profitable, even if less glamorous. For one thing, the Zundapp work force is a bloated 800, and Enfield estimates that this needs to be reduced to 200, which may not be easy. For another, Zundapp's labour bill is much too high, accounting for 20 per cent of the total cost, against Enfield's 4 per cent. Whichever option is finally taken, Enfield spokesmen leave little room for doubt that the Madras-based company is about to benefit from the unexpected opportunity presented by an industrial closure in faraway Munich.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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FORECAST

Mixed Fortunes

THE BOUNTIES of two good monsoons may have generated some momentum in the economy, but there is no evidence yet of widespread economic recovery. Forecasts from THE POLICY GROUP *macro-econometric model show some disturbing trends for 1984—85.*

PRICES

Inflation has accelerated over the last quarter and is predicted to be 9 per cent this year. It is rather surprising that agricultural commodities and agro-based manufactures dominate the profile of the price rise in recent months, due perhaps to excess demand generated by farmers on a spending spree. Although wheat and rice prices appear to have stabilized, the surge in prices of other essential commodities such as edible oils and pulses shows no signs of slackening.

In this context, India appears to be out of synch with the rest of the world. The years following the second oil shock in 1979 were not high inflation years here unlike elsewhere, but currently prices are rising faster than in many other countries. (U.S.—3-4 per cent, U.K.—4 per cent, West Germany—1.5 per cent). With domestic costs rising faster than international commodity prices there is likely to be considerable downward pressure on the rupee vis a vis other currencies.

GDP

National Income is expected to rise about 4 per cent this year; unfortunately not a repeat of last year's (7.4 per cent) performance, but not a bad average for the two years combined. Over the full sixth five-year plan, average economic growth rate is thus around five per cent, more or less on target.

AGRICULTURAL

According to The Policy Group's Monsoon Index this year's rainfall was marginally better than last year's and agriculture is forecast to grow a further 2.5 per cent over last year's record. Foodgrain output is expected to reach another record of 155.7 million tonnes, with a 46.1 million tonne wheat crop and 61.4 million tonnes of rice.

INDUSTRY

Manufacturing output is expected to increase by 4.4 per cent over last year. Although the Government refers to this as a boom in industry, by international standards—particularly of the newly industrialised countries like South Korea or Taiwan—a 5 per cent growth rate is by no means exceptional.

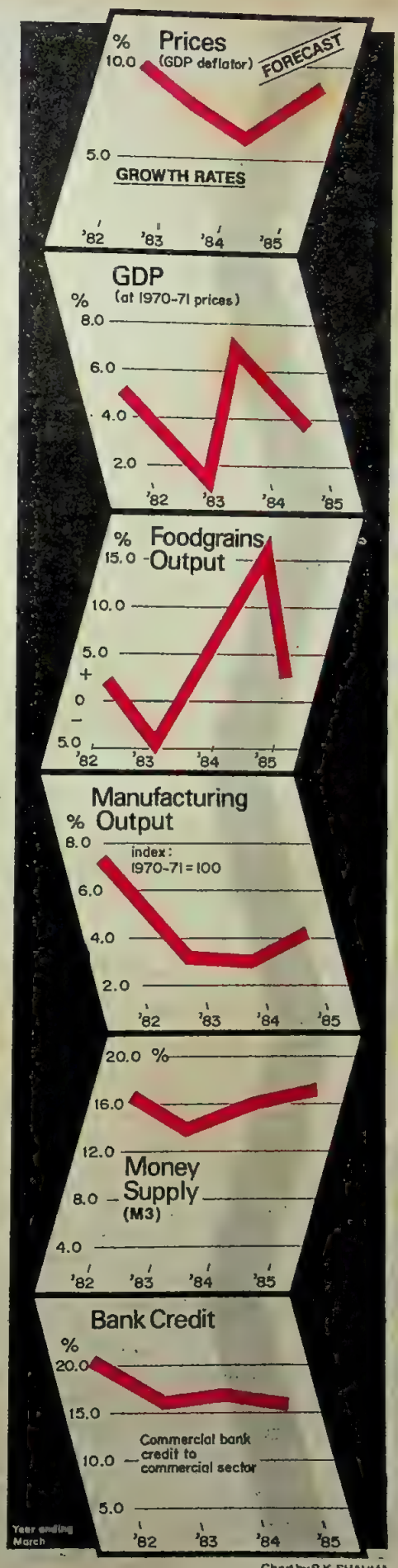


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Critically dependent as it is on agricultural income for generating demand for its products and supply of its raw materials, an industrial revival is generally heralded by a good harvest. There is, however, a time lag between a bumper crop and the additional demand generated for industrial goods. The data since 1970 shows that industrial production only accelerates around January of the year following a good harvest. This pattern was repeated this year when the current industrial revival began in a somewhat desultory fashion. However, the second crop bonanza should fuel this accelerated growth and industry can expect the boom in demand to continue right through to next year.

INFRASTRUCTURE

An index of infrastructural industries is currently showing a healthy 9.3 per cent increase. The index covers electricity, coal and wagon movement and the indications are that infrastructural inputs will be less of a constraint on industry this year. A detailed study of the impact of infrastructure on industrial growth suggests that unless the index grows at less than 5.6 per cent, it will not be a major bottleneck holding back manufacturing output this year.

MONEY AND CREDIT

Money supply will grow a further 18 per cent over last year, somewhat higher than in the last few years. With impending elections the government is finding it hard to cut back on expenditure, as indicated by increased government short term borrowings from the RBI by sale of treasury bills: for the period April-September, 1984 treasury bill sales were Rs. 2,700 crore higher than for the same period last year. Sales of treasury bills inflate budget deficits which form an important constituent of money supply; fortunately, for the Government the full inflationary impact on prices will not be felt until well after the elections are over. On average the effect of monetary expansion on prices usually takes about 15 months to mature.

Banks credit to firms is on the whole relatively slow and is forcast to grow about 16.6 per cent over last year. This figure is the lowest in five years. Industry has been constrained by credit curbs in some of these years and there are all indications that the current credit slowdown could retard the industrial recovery that is underway.

IRDP

Favouring a Few

WELFARE and poverty-removal programmes are now a dime a dozen. But the biggest of them all is the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), under which the banks give out loans to hundreds of thousands of the poor for a wide variety of income-generating schemes. In the last five years alone, a staggering Rs 3,433 crore have been loaned out in this fashion.

While much of the money has undoubtedly gone to the right people for the right purposes, there have been indications that a good deal hasn't. INDIA TODAY *correspondents toured selected districts in Rajasthan and Haryana recently to assess how far things had gone wrong, and to study the nature of the problem. Principal Correspondent* RAJU SANTHANAM *went to the constituencies of the Haryana and Rajasthan chief ministers, and filed this report adding information from other correspondents:*

IN NANDSEMA village in Rajasthan, camels are hardly rare. But when one camel is sold to 27 different villagers, people might be forgiven for considering it an updated version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. It really is no such thing, however. This rare proliferation of a single camel is only the magic of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) at work in rural Rajasthan, though not quite the way it was intended to. Under the IRDP, loans worth Rs 6 lakh are given to every block (clusters of villages) to be distributed to the 6,000 poorest families. Villagers are expected to use the money to buy livestock, or for basic developmental activity which will enable them to better their lives economically. This may have been achieved to some extent, but the IRDP has also encouraged corruption and fiddling of the most innovative kind. Thus in Nandsema, 27 villagers received loans to buy camels in the space of four years, but pocketed the money and passed the camel on in a dizzy merry-go-round.

The programme, launched in a small way in 1978-79, was extended to all the 5,011 blocks in the country from October 1980. But it has picked up tempo since then, and compared to an outgo of Rs 448 crore in 1980-81, a stupendous Rs 1,180 crore was distributed in just one year's time last year—1983-84. By any standards, the loans are soft. Families earning less than Rs 3,500 a year (Rs 290 a month) get between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,000 for a period of three to five years, at between five and ten per cent interest. No guarantees or securities are sought from the borrower.

With reports of widespread corruption and massive bungling, it might well be that a good percentage of the 120 lakh villagers who have benefited from it in the past four years—receiving loans totalling a staggering Rs 3,433 crore—are fake. Villagers with a combined family income of under Rs 290 a month alone are eligible for the loans, but investigation reveals that many of the beneficiaries are obviously well-off. In Mahua village, for instance, one of the beneficiaries of a loan, Mohan Bhagirath Khati, owns 30 bighas of land and a tractor.

Some villagers have shown a remarkable ability to get loans sanctioned. Kalia Meghwal of Jorma village in Udaipur district is a fairly well-to-do farmer. He managed to get loans to buy buffaloes twice in the space of two years. When bank officials, smelling something fishy, drove down to the village, they found he didn't have even one buffalo. Veterinary doctors are often bribed to certify that the animal that had been purchased is dead. A bank officer from Udaipur complains: "There are fake insurance claims. The animal never existed in the first place, and then it died mysteriously."

Besides, to make them eligible for the loan, single unmarried girls have declared themselves as "family". And in Jakhodkhera village in Haryana, Gurjeet Singh managed to get a loan despite the fact that he is wealthy enough to own a tractor, and that his four brothers who constitute his family are also earning. For those who really want the loan regardless of whether they are eligible or not, all they have to do is bribe the scrutiny officer—in this case the village sarpanch. In Jalandhari village, there were complaints that for every loan sanctioned, the sarpanch took a "cut" of Rs 100. And in Soupra village of Kordi tehsil in Bhilwara, a rich villager said: "The poor in my village will remain poor because they never manage to get the loans."

With so much money involved, the scheme has inevitably acquired a political colour. In Rajasthan, as elsewhere, it is being touted as a major achievement of the ruling party, and is being pushed through with such enthusiasm that the state crossed the target in 1982-83 by advancing loans to 1.83 lakh families. Interestingly, if the norms of the IRDP are considered to be scrupulously followed in Rajasthan, then Bhilwara district is the poorest in the state, since it has the highest number of loanees—Bhilwara also happens to be where most of Mandalgarh, the constituency of Chief Minister S.C. Mathur, falls. A bank officer at Mandalgarh says disgustedly: "We are approached by arrogant villagers who claim to have connections with the chief minister. They even threaten us with transfer if we refuse to give the loans."

While Rajasthan, a backward state, might deserve attention, the manner in which IRDP funds are freely available in prosperous Haryana is astonishing. Haryana started out with 87 blocks two years ago, but now has 93 blocks. As a consequence, its share of the IRDP cake has increased by Rs 36 lakh, since each block is allotted Rs 6 lakh for distribution.

It is hardly surprising that last year an additional block was created in Adampur, the constituency of Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal. Thus, his voters now get an additional Rs 6 lakh to be spent in a year. A visit to Jakhodkhera village in the constituency shows where at least some of the money is going. Its well-laid brick houses and TV antennae could easily put it on a tourism poster touting the attractions of the state. Yet as many as 58 villagers of this one village have been identified as being among the poorest in the country, receiving a whopping Rs 1.2 lakh in just eight months. Official records show that loans for at least 24 buffaloes, 26 camels and 60 sheep have been given in this village, but a visit to Jakhodkhera shows no trace of these animals.

MYSTERIOUSLY, in Haryana, a new scheme is afoot to benefit villages that have already been covered under the IRDP, instead of extending the benefits to other villages. In Hissar district, a scheme tagged "Priority II" is being taken up with great enthusiasm. Of the 40-odd villages in Bhajan Lal's constituency, 30 are being covered under the new scheme which envisages an intensive follow-up of the schemes already taken up in the IRDP. Coincidentally, 23 villages in the constituency of Congress(I) MLA I.S. Nain in Burwala also enjoy the benefits of the Priority II scheme. However, an official of the Planning Commission which monitors the IRDP was mystified: "What is Priority II?" he asked. "I have never heard of it." Significantly, this new scheme is being taken up in the election year.

Officials in Delhi concede that there may be some bungling, but say that me-



Jakhodkhera's well-laid brick houses and TV antennae could easily put it on a tourism map. Yet 58 of its villagers have been identified as being among the poorest in the country.



Gurjeet Singh managed to get a loan despite the fact that he is wealthy enough to own a tractor and his four brothers, who constitute his family, are also earning.



Records show that Mohar Singh's camel was branded with the number HC 254. But a visit to his house shows his camel bears no such number.

sures like branding the animal—if the loan has been given for the purchase of livestock—might help. But, in reality, that is no help. For instance, Mohar Singh of Saikhpur village (Darauli block, Haryana) received a loan to buy a camel. The records show that his camel was branded with the number HC 254. But a visit to Singh's house shows the camel bears no such number. Confronted with the fact, he brings a metal token which bears another number altogether, and lamely explains that he "exchanged his camel".

On their part, bank officials privately admit that they have no way of verifying the loans. This falls to the lot of the District Rural Development Agency, which is the identification agency. Bank officials say that if they complain or raise objections to a loan, they are accused of putting "obstacles in the way of progress".

Strangely enough for a scheme into which as much as Rs 3,433 crore has been sunk, the quality of monitoring is almost non-existent. So far there has been no comprehensive study on the recovery of loans, considering that most loans are for a maximum of five years, and six years have passed since the scheme was first introduced. S.D. Bansal, general manager of the Punjab National Bank, who coordinates his bank's efforts in the programme, explains cautiously that the fact that loans are given without taking into account the problems of the borrower, accounts for the poor recovery. He adds: "There is usually a bunching of applications as the end of the financial year approaches. At times, bank managers have to deal with 300-400 cases, as a result of which the quality of loaning suffers."

Although no authoritative investigation of recoveries has been made yet, a sample survey indicates that while in Lucknow it is as low as 28 per cent, in Ajmer the recovery is 70 per cent. The only solution, say bank officials, is to make district authorities more accountable. "For the moment the banks are saddled with the problem of loan recovery which they are competent to take up, but their efforts would receive a fillip if the district authorities also helped," says an official.

Because the IRDP is a welfare programme, officials are inclined to take a lenient view of loan recovery. Says one official: "It is the quality of loaning we have to see. Have we actually raised the standard of living of the poorest of the poor?" Unfortunately, the manipulations of politicians in their own constituencies have ensured that even with the IRDP, as with many other welfare programmes, some of the rural poor are more equal than others.

THE MODIS

Rough Weather

THREE years ago, the Modis were setting a scorching pace as one of the fastest growing industrial houses in the country. But the shine has faded from a clutch of Modi companies. And last fortnight, members of the Modi family were shuttling between Delhi and Lucknow to work out a bail-out package for the partially-closed Modi Spinning and Weaving Co Ltd, which is in a sense the group's mother company.

Other group companies are not in the pink of health either. Bombay Tyres International (formerly Firestone), one of the group's heavyweights, is heading for a loss this year, the once money-spinning Modi Rubber will barely break even, and the profitable Godfrey Phillips India has a Rs 46 crore excise question hanging over its head. Modi Carpets Ltd and the more recently set up Modi Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd are just emerging from the wood, the first recovering from a sudden loss of Soviet orders two years ago, and the second from the short sharp price war in the caustic soda industry.

The other Modi companies are in fine fettle, including Modi Industries, Modipon and Indofil Chemicals, but the three troubled units—Modi Spinning, Modi Rubber and Bombay Tyres—account for close to half the group's total turnover of about Rs 1,000 crore. So the group as a whole has run into choppy waters.

All the five divisions of Modi Spinning (peak turnover: Rs 68 crore) were shut down some months ago, but two have since started functioning again. But the company, with an equity base of Rs 5.5 crore, has accumulated liabilities of a staggering Rs 33 crore, and some creditors have filed in the Allahabad High Court for closing down the whole company. Bhupendra Kumar Modi, who has been negotiating a rescue package, feels the company can still be rescued. But for that to happen it will have to hive off close to half its 12,000 work-force, the banks and other creditors must clear a plan to raise Rs 15 crore by selling some of the company's land and houses in Modinagar, 45 km from Delhi, as well as some shares held in Modipon and Modi Rubber. And the banks must also be willing to write off part of the accumulated interest liability, plus reduce the rate of interest, after the Government declares the company a relief undertaking.

All these are a part of the rescue package, but amount to a tall order. Meanwhile, Modi Rubber (turnover: Rs 250 crore) has launched an unprecedented economy drive aimed at saving Rs 50 lakh a month—Rs 6 crore a year—so that the company can survive in the now bitterly competitive tyre market. Already, the company is booking orders from bulk users at a loss, which is considered preferable to losing the orders and the company's share of the market.



Group Chairman K.N. Modi: problems

The three troubled units account for close to half the Modi group's total turnover of some Rs 1,000 crore. So the group as a whole has run into choppy waters.

The economy drive which includes anything from cutting perks to saving on electricity bills, has now been extended to other group companies as well.

But Modi Rubber can at least claim that it is basically a sound company riding out a problem faced by the tyre industry as a whole. In comparison, Bombay Tyres (turnover: Rs 124 crore) has more serious problems. Much of its plant was obsolete when the Modis acquired it from Firestone three years ago. This has been partly rectified, but the company is still saddled with problems of excess and overpaid manpower. The annual report lists some 2,000 people who get over Rs 3,000 a month, while Modi Rubber has fewer than 400 although the company is about twice the size of Bombay Tyres.

Family efforts, meanwhile, are concentrated on pulling Modi Spinning out of the mire. One of the crucial problems that this industrial unit has been facing is labour trouble, sparked off over four years ago by a cross-fire of union wars, political interference and the rough weather confronting the textile industry. Over 30 people were killed in the union wars, seven murders occurring on one day alone, and a number of technicians and managers quit for quieter pastures. Losses mounted to Rs 80 lakh a month, says Mahendra Kumar Modi, 40, and the mills were finally closed down.

But the labour problem now seems to be getting sorted out. Group Chairman K.N. Modi and other members of the management addressed a mass gathering of 4,000 employees recently, paving the way for re-starting the thread mill and one or two others. But one of the company's two yarn mills will be permanently closed —this being facilitated by converting the five divisions into wholly-owned subsidiaries of Modi Spinning some months ago. Also, some Rs 11 crore have been pumped into the company from other group outfits and from family coffers.

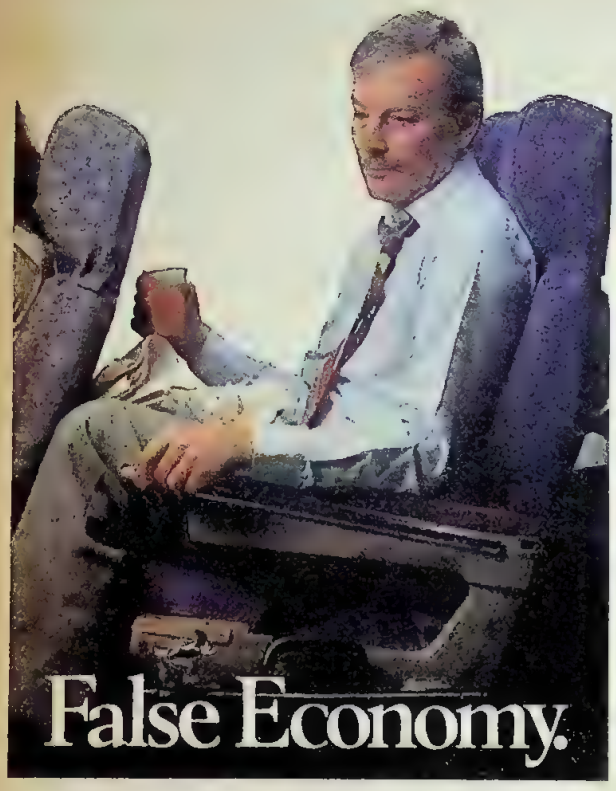
But the key to the units' full revival lies in the acceptance of the comprehensive rescue package cobbled together by the consultancy firm A.F. Ferguson. And Modi family members have been pressing the Uttar Pradesh Government for recommending a relief undertaking status for the company as this will pave the way for concessions from the banks and other financial institutions.

Nevertheless the group's reputation in the financial markets is not what it used to be. Modi Xerox floated a public share issue recently, but though the issue was oversubscribed six times, independent observers say this is less than what it should have been.

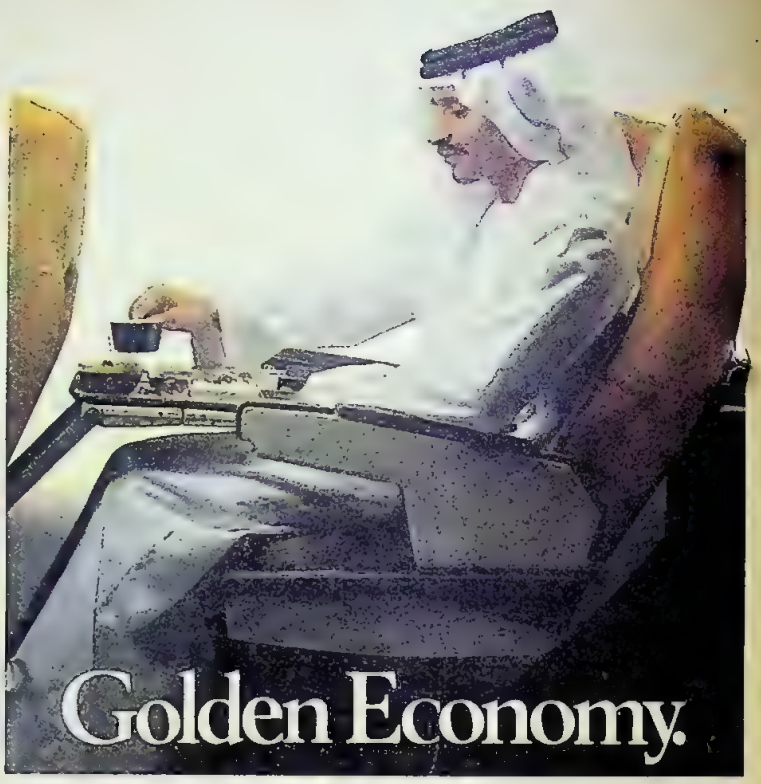
Meanwhile, group spokesmen argue that the group as a whole has a lot of inherent strength. Modi Industries has had a "very good year", Modipon expects a 13 per cent return on net assets after taxes, higher than the industry average, and Indofil Chemicals Ltd, which is being merged with Modipon, is going great guns. Commenting on the state of affairs, Y.K. Modi says: "That a major company is sick is of course a big setback. And if one finger is sick, you can't say the whole body is isolated from it. But our growth will continue." That may well be so, but other group spokesmen say that the next six months will be a time for consolidation. Clearly, the Modis will have to keep their sails trimmed till the storm clouds disappear.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI


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THE MARKETS

Holding On

FOR THOSE with short memories it may be news that the stock-market, with all its ups and downs, is precisely where it was this time a year ago. Some shares are up and some are down, as they always will be, but the overall index doesn't seem to have gained much during the year, which is really surprising considering that it is being touted as a year of great recovery. The bumper harvests may come and go but the stock-markets go their own way and one sometimes wonders whether they have a life of their own totally unrelated to the national economy. This happens in other countries too. In England, for instance, the share index is very close to the year's high though there are few signs of industrial recovery in that country.

Most shares have perked up during the past fortnight though, with Calcutta closed, and most investors in a holiday mood, the volume traded must have been small indeed. But it is probably a pointer to the shape of things to come, for Diwali is round the corner and things should start moving briskly from the New Year's day. It is still too early to say which way they will move but if Dalal Street is any guide they will be moving towards a mini-boom around budget time, unless the general election results cast a pall of gloom over the scenario.

In Bombay, Associated Cement has gained by more than 10 per cent and so has Colgate. Reliance Textiles too has been moving up along with most Tata companies including Tata Steel (...24), Telco (...43) and Voltas (...20). Gujarat Fertilisers is also up on rumours of a bonus issue. In fact, it is the bonus issues which seem to be keeping the market out of the dumps, but probably there are other reasons too. Even Siemens, one of the steadiest of scrips, has moved five points in the last couple of weeks.

Some scrips have done remarkably well, considering that only a few years ago they had been relegated to the sick bay. Bata is one of them. Some, on the other hand, have been so steady one doesn't know what to make of them. Chloride India doesn't change much year after year except when a bonus issue is due. Ranbaxy too has been steady throughout the year though the needle did move up slightly on reports that the company may come out with a bonus issue. It has, however, so much on its plate—its Dewas plant has just come on stream—that its shareholders will probably have to wait another year or so, may be less, for the bonus goodies. On the other hand, there are companies like Usha Martin which are so steady one has almost forgotten that they exist. But they do and so do one time high fliers like Guest Keen Williams and Indian Oxygen which, for one reason or another, are lying low.

This is a good time to pick up some good scrips at the grassroots as it were, scrips of new issues whose allotment has just been finalised. Nearly all of them are being quoted above par but they should be attractive nonetheless. A number of new issues are said to be in the pipeline but the promoters may decide to postpone them until after the elections, though this is unlikely. A bird in the bush is always better than two in the air, for who knows what the elections will bring in their wake, even if they are the birds of the same feather.

ACTIVE STOCKS

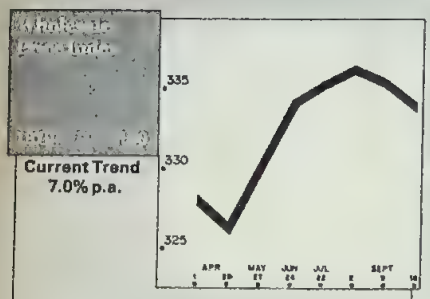
	1984 HIGH	1984 LOW	CLOSE 11.10.84	Change on fortnight
Asea	75.00	48.00	75.00	13.50 +
Ashok Leyland	37.50	27.50	28.50	0.50 +
Associated Cement	458.00	298.50	458.00	51.00 +
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.00	30.50	1.00 –
Ballarpur	53.30	43.30	45.50	1.30 +
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	275.50	10.50 +
BASF	49.00	28.50	43.50	0.50 +
Bata India	48.35	33.30	45.50	5.00 +
Bharat Commerce	20.65	15.10	15.25	0.15 +
Birla Jute	62.50	52.10	54.80	1.80 +
Blow Plast	48.50	37.50	41.00	3.50 +
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	30.00	nil
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	59.00	61.50	2.50 +
Britannia Industries	46.00	33.60	46.00	8.50 +
Brooke Bond	45.00	34.10	41.50	1.00 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	847.50	7.50 +
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	50.00	3.00 +
Coates of India	30.87	24.50	24.50	3.50 –
Colgate	136.00	100.00	136.00	21.00 +
Cynamid	45.50	32.00	33.50	2.50 –
DCM	76.12	47.00	51.25	2.75 +
Dunlop	27.60	23.30	23.30	0.90 –
East India Hotels	40.25	29.00	35.50	0.50 –
Escorts	76.00	50.25	57.25	7.00 +
Food Specialities	92.00	69.00	83.50	5.50 +
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	20.30	21.10	nil
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	54.75	3.75 +
Herdillia Chemicals	26.00	20.50	24.75	1.25 –
Hindustan Aluminium	50.70	44.00	50.70	3.80 +
Hindustan Cocoa	55.00	21.00	54.00	2.00 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	50.50	1.50 +
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	42.80	1.00 +
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.00	24.80	0.60 +
Indian Explosives	30.50	25.00	30.50	3.25 +
Indian Organic	45.50	31.00	45.50	4.75 +
Indian Oxygen	38.25	33.00	36.50	0.25 +
Indian Rayon	76.50	54.50	62.25	2.25 +
J.K. Synthetics	52.80	39.00	52.80	4.00 +
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	42.75	7.25 –
Kinetic Engineering	156.00	113.00	151.00	2.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	560.00	407.50	547.50	14.50 +
Kothari (Madras)	27.00	22.00	25.50	nil
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	65.00	77.00	2.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	45.00	47.00	0.50 +
Mangalam Cement	31.00	21.00	27.50	1.75 +
Modi Rubber	30.31	24.50	25.00	0.50 –
National Organic	243.00	176.50	220.00	13.50 +
Nirlon	39.00	32.00	36.25	0.50 +
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	62.25	4.75 +
Otis Elevator	73.00	54.00	73.00	3.00 +
Premier Automobiles	314.00	246.00	312.50	9.50 +
Ranbaxy	55.00	44.00	47.00	0.50 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	53.00	53.00	5.50 –
Reliance Textiles	144.00	110.00	144.00	19.00 +
Shriram Fibres	38.75	30.47	38.50	0.25 +
Siemens	47.50	41.00	44.50	3.50 +
SPIC	39.75	28.06	39.75	0.75 +
Straw Products	57.00	42.20	46.00	1.20 +
Tata Chemicals	71.00	53.00	62.00	nil
Tata Steel	342.50	244.50	342.50	14.50 +
Telco	430.00	385.00	430.00	43.00 +
Texmaco	69.80	49.60	69.80	4.10 +
Union Carbide	29.50	24.40	29.00	1.50 +
Unit Trust	14.35	12.60	13.25	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

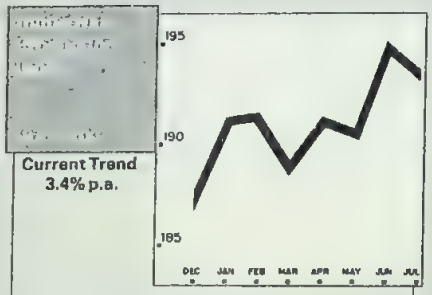
COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	10.0619	9.8661
Austria	Schilling	100	56.6438	55.6251
Bahrain	Dinar	1	31.4022	31.1019
Bangladesh	Taka	100	47.0523	46.7822
Canada	Dollar	1	9.1915	9.0260
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.0990	1.0790
Egypt	Pound	1	14.2012	14.1009
France	Franc	1	1.2960	1.2722
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5452	1.5175
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1101	1.0702
Iran	Rial	100	11.6220	11.1920
Italy	Lira	100	0.6292	0.6101
Japan	Yen	100	4.8966	4.8091
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7722	0.7601
Kuwait	Dinar	1	38.8712	38.0121
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0615	4.9538
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8021	0.7992
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7091	0.6999
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.5281	3.4638
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8091	0.7992
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.5789	5.4748
Spain	Peseta	100	6.1234	6.0019
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4522	0.4500
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.4021	1.3789
Switzerland	France	1	4.8120	4.7250
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6529	0.6499
Thailand	Baht	100	50.3334	50.1129
UK	Pound	1	14.9823	14.8478
USA	Dollar	1	12.0125	11.8750
UAE	Dirham	1	3.1929	3.0919
USSR	Rouble	1	13.7122	13.5299
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9777	3.9326

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 5.10.84.

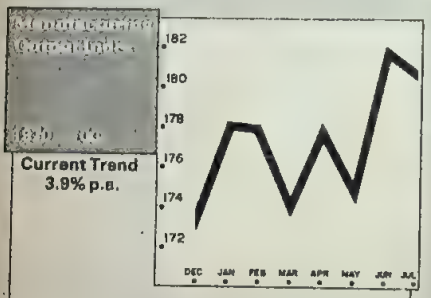
THE ECONOMY MONITOR is being introduced this issue as a regular fortnightly feature. Using the latest available data from the Government and processed by THE POLICY GROUP, Delhi-based group of economists to iron out seasonal fluctuations, this feature presents a comprehensive index of the behaviour of the economy and its key sectors. The trend growth rates indicated are computed on the basis of the six months' seasonally adjusted data, to which a regression is fitted.



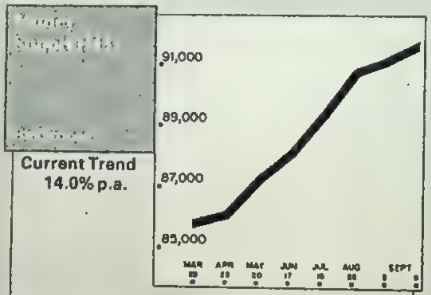
With two good monsoons finally taking effect, last fortnight prices declined by 0.7 per cent due to falls in both primary products as well as manufactures.



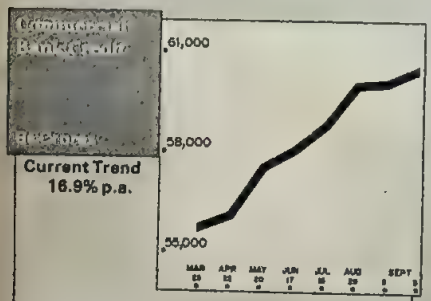
The drop in industrial production of nearly 1 per cent is due to declines in all major components.



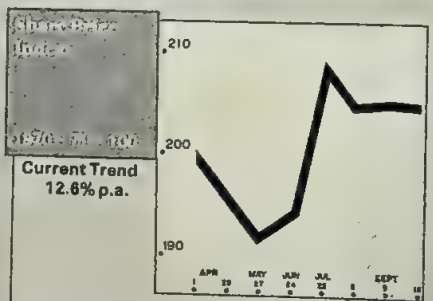
Production of manufactures was down 0.7 per cent last month mainly because of sharp declines in the machinery-producing sector.



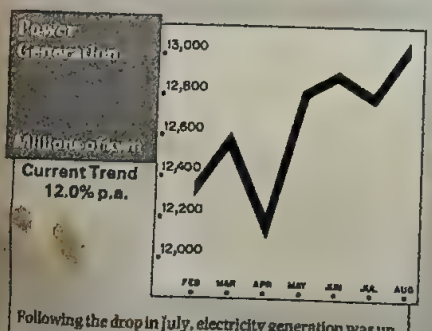
Money supply jumped a further 1 per cent last fortnight well above the trend rate; an increase in the country's foreign exchange was a major contributing factor.



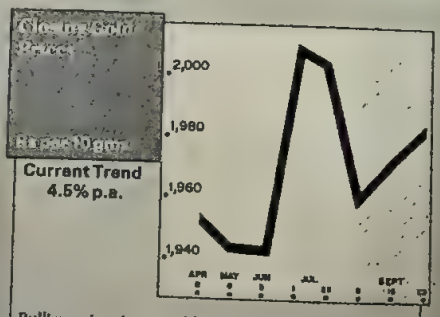
Bank credit to the commercial sector was up 0.7 per cent last fortnight, indicating a slowdown as compared to the underlying trend rate.



Industrial securities were marginally higher last fortnight maintaining the annual trend. Shipping securities recorded a relatively sharp upsurge.



Following the drop in July, electricity generation was up sharply by 2 per cent in August, mainly due to a pick up in hydro-electricity generation.



Bullion prices increased by 1.1 per cent last fortnight, well above the annual trend rate of increase.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Sectors with maximum change in May 1984

	% Growth
Linoleum Products	1989.00
Jute Textiles	131.90
Jute Machinery	80.71
Steam Generating Plants	43.37
Laboratory Ware	28.24
Fine Chemicals	22.74
Nuts, Screws & Bolts	18.09
Railway Rolling Stock	16.33
Cosmetics & Toilet Products	16.31
Transport Equipment	14.39
Metallurgical Machinery	14.38
Coffee Curing Works	14.02
Cement Machinery	13.04
Hard, Fibre & Chipboard	12.46
Dry Cells	12.05
Leather Products (excl. footwear)	10.55
Electrical Fans	10.38
Matches	9.76
Vegetable & Animal Oils (inedible)	9.72
Surgical & Medical Products	8.27
Sheet & Plate Glass	8.12
Salt	8.04
Cotton Fabrics (decentralised sect.)	7.70
Footwear	7.38
Internal Combustion Engines	7.37
Paper Machinery	7.14
Motor Cars	7.01
Storage Batteries	6.65
Tea Machinery	6.18
Electric Light & Power	5.50
Sugar Machinery	4.84
Metal Products	4.15
Hydrogenated Oil (Vanaspati)	3.58
Cement (hydraulic)	3.58
Artificial Leather	3.57
Sanitary & White Ware	3.33
Drugs & Pharmaceuticals	3.13
Dairy Machinery	3.08
Jewellery	2.92
Weighing Machines	2.88
Handtools & Small Tools	2.74
Wood & Saw Mills	2.48
Tanneries	2.45
Paper	2.41
Enamelling, Polishing Products	2.38
Inorganic Chemicals	2.01
Paints, Varnishes & Lacquers	1.61

—Of the 119 major industries considered, 50 industries with a weight of 42.3 accelerated and 69 industries with a weight of 52.2, decelerated during the period.
—Labour disputes in the previous month can sometimes cause exceptionally high growth rates.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Coal Th. Tonnes-August	10268	10088
Salable Steel Th. Tonnes-August	560.4	530.5
Cement Th. Tonnes-July	2388	2104
Crude Petroleum Th. Tonnes-August	2258	2234
Rail Movement Net Tonnes Kms-August	13838	13301
Call Money Rate-B'bay Percentage-August	9.85	8.74

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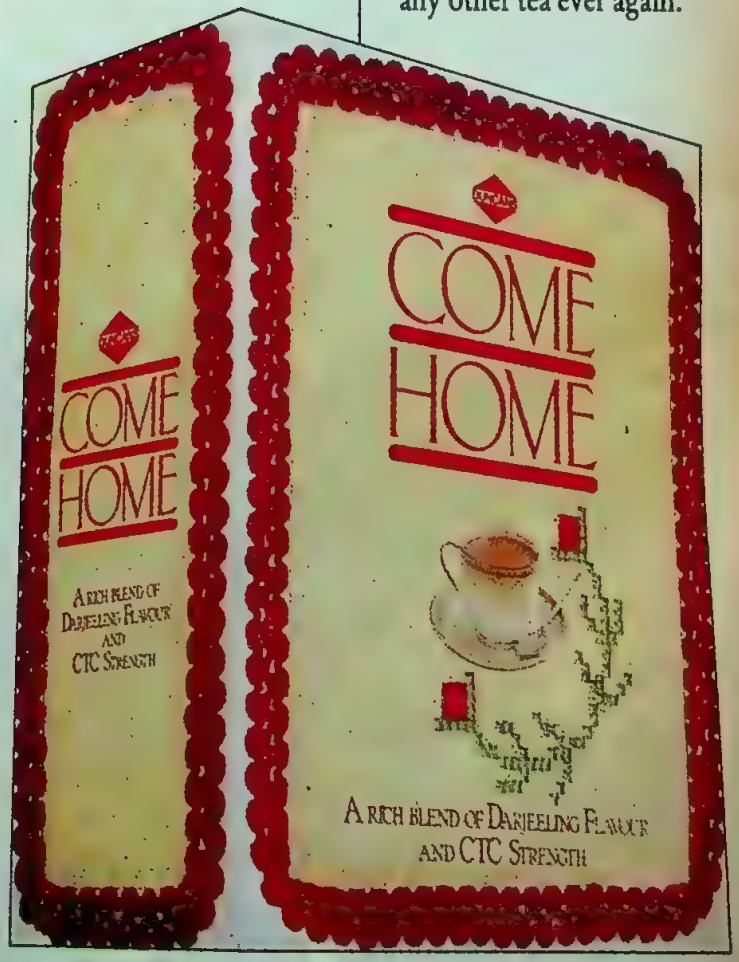
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BOMBAY

Shooting Gallery

HIS DEATH was as bloody as his life. Early one morning, last fortnight, as Bombay's sinister "killer for hire" Samad Khan stepped out of the lift in a building in south Bombay with three companions, he was riddled by over 20 bullets. The killers—members of the rival gang of Dawood Ibrahim—fled from the scene in three waiting cars. Khan's death came as but a grisly climax to a mounting gang warfare between two rival groups who in the past have stopped at nothing.

The 28-year-old scion of the underworld, Khan was notorious both for his brazen behaviour as a hired hit man and extortionist as well as for his well-known family ties with underworld boss Karim Lala. Though once considered Lala's heir apparent, Lala had ironically enough, only three days before his nephew's death, inserted a notice in a daily newspaper stating that his name was being unnecessarily connected with the alleged activities of his brother's son and he would file a defamation suit against anyone who continued to do so. Lala who runs the Jirgah-e-Hind organisation described himself as a "peace-loving citizen leading a comparatively retired life". Nevertheless Lala was chief mourner at Khan's funeral which was attended by over 2,000 people including personalities like Muslim League MP G.M. Banatwala and film star Dilip Kumar's brother Ahsan Khan.

Khan was certainly no cheap hit man. His price was a reported Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh per kill. But Khan was considered too volatile, too trigger-happy and often too indiscreet for his own good. Police records reveal that he was connected with at least 10 killings, the last being on September 17 when he fired two rounds from a moving car at a man named Iqbal who was sitting on the bonnet of another car. A month earlier he shot a passport agent at Santa Cruz. Last December, he was arrested for the murder of Texmaco senior executive S.K. Jain at the Sea Rock Hotel. In 1981, he was accused of killing a man while trying to get him to sign a flat sale deal. Then, last year, in August, he escaped from his police escort in the compound of the city civil court and sped away with his girl-friend Shilpa Jhaveri whom he later married. But his most outrageous act yet was in May last year when he was in the Central Jail in Bombay. He got his henchmen to bring two potential witnesses against him to jail and proceeded to shave off their heads in patches with gruesome delight.

Yet, despite everything, Khan always managed to stay out of jail. The police for their part refuse to shoulder the blame for such hardened criminals being out on the streets unchecked. Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro points out that Khan was in fact twice detained under NSA but managed to be freed by the advisory board. He also managed to obtain bail in half-a-dozen murder cases for which he was ar-

GOPAL SHETTY/Free Press Journal





Khan's funeral procession (top); Samad Khan (inset) and Karim Lala (bottom right) mourning his nephew's death

rested. "Thanks to the recent judgements of the Supreme Court, the attitude of the judges is to grant bail not jail, with the result that criminals with the help of top flight lawyers can go scot free," Ribeiro notes regretfully.

Samad Khan was merely the latest victim in the Mafia-like vendetta war between Bombay's two leading underworld gangs: the Pathan Amirzada Alamzeb group and the gang led by Dawood Ibrahim. The Pathan gang is involved in drug smuggling along the Pakistan border while the Ibrahim gang concentrates on smuggling along the Gujarat coastline. Though close friends at one time, the two fell out over the slaying of a restaurant owner friend of Ibrahim. The resultant feud has become so bitter that the usual gangster code of honour that disallows killing their own has been disregarded, it appears from recent happenings, with brutal impunity.

Dawood's brother Ibrahim was gunned down at a petrol pump in Prabhadevi in 1981. In September last year, Amirzada himself was shot dead in a crowded courtroom by David Pardeshi dressed in a naval ratings uniform. Just five days after Samad Khan's death, David Pardeshi escaped from the Arthur Road jail in a manner truly reminiscent of movieland tradition. He got away by cutting off the bars of his cell window and climbing down a rope, aided, police suspect, by sympathetic jail employees.

WHILE the gang bang continues, the original Godfathers of the underworld maintain a discreet facade of respectability. Former COFEPOSA detenus like Yusuf Patel deny having any involvement with gangsterism and smuggling. Says he: "The oath I took before Jayaprakash Narayan was one which any Indian citizen would take. I promised to uphold the integrity of the country and not commit any economic offence." Meanwhile, Haji Mastan announced earlier this month that he was planning to join hands with the Dalits for forming a party that would protect the interests of minority communities. Later, he clarified that his party would not be a political one and he would continue to support the Congress(I).

The power they now wield was evident when the state Home Ministry took a decision to release them from detention under NSA in July after they were arrested by the police for involvement in the May communal riots in Bhiwandi. Mastan, after his release, disbanded his social welfare body, the All India People's Secretariat on the premise that there was no point doing good and getting into trouble for it. Remarking on the enormous clout that these former underworld leaders have, Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray observes: "These smugglers first became apartment builders and now they have become nation builders."

The clout was again much in evidence when an ambulance driver of the Tamil Peervai Association (TPA), another social welfare body, was arrested by the police following the seizure of Rs 46 lakh worth of contraband in Raigad. The COFEPOSA Board had recommended the detention of the founder president of the TPA, Vardarajan Mudaliar, for his links in the case. But again the state Home Ministry overruled the Board's decision. With such liberal attitudes prevailing, it is hardly surprising that Bombay is fast starting to resemble the Chicago of the '30s.

—COOMI KAPOOR

BELGAUM

Killing Spree

THE BORDER district of Belgaum in Karnataka is rapidly resembling a human slaughterhouse. Hardly a day passes without a savagely mutilated body being discovered. Last year, there were 183 murders. By the end of August this year, the murder toll stood at 81, more than half the average for the entire state.

Perplexingly, psychologists and the police are unable to explain what it is about the area that devalues human life to such a base level. All they have are statistics that can only provide minor clues but no concrete answers to the whole. These are:

- the people of the area are quite unconcerned, even indifferent, about the high murder rate;
- the adjoining districts have a murder rate that is compatible with the average for the rest of the state;
- the two most common motives usually relate to land disputes or sex;
- the murders are unusually gruesome with victims usually being dismembered or their heads hacked off;
- murder weapons are farm implements or even large stones. Knives or firearms are rarely employed; and
- the rate of convictions by the courts is abysmally low in murder cases.

Even with all the statistical data available, Belgaum's crime rate still continues to defy all logic. Says the Deputy Inspector General of Police, B.M. Yeshwantgol: "Dowry and the motive of immediate gain do not account for many of the murders. But the people attach considerable value to property no matter how small it may be."

Widow and children of a murder victim



Local residents say that the people of the area are extremely God-fearing and have a great respect for authority but are also prone to blinding spurts of anger, particularly over land and sexual disputes. In fact, murder has become such a common everyday fact of life that even convicted murderers are welcomed back to their families with open arms and rejoin the mainstream of village life without any problems.

Part of the reason that the law is treated with such contempt is the ineffectiveness of the police and the courts. Of the 155 murder cases that came up before the courts in 1983, there were 59 acquittals and in only 15 cases were convictions possible.

Police officials say that the main problem is the use of hired killers which makes their investigations doubly difficult. They are usually hired by the richer landowners to settle old scores and, being professional mercenaries, are rarely caught. One village, Hosur, known locally as 'Khooni Hosur' witnessed 21 murders last year. Not one of the murderers was caught. Against that background, Belgaum seems to be desperately searching for a dubious niche in criminal history. And, for no discernible reason either.

—K. BHANUMATHI



ORISSA : 33, Ashoknagar, Bhubaneswar. Bengal Handloom, Shop No.3, Sector No.5, Rourkela. BIHAR: Alankar Jewellary Building, Garga Bridge Road, Chas, Dhanbad. Shop No.2 (Mill Area), Thakur Pyer Singh Market, Sakchi, Jamshedpur. Rajendra Path, Kadamkuan, Patna-3. Khanjanchi Market, Main Road, Ranchi. Sah Katra, New Market Road, Katihar. ASSAM : 89, G.S Road, Ulubari, Gauhati-7. 8/A, Mahabir Market, Fancy Bazar, Gauhati. Barabazar, Pandu, Gauhati-12. Club Road, Silchar. Prakash Bazar, Tinsukia. Habibullah Samsuddin Agency, Rahabari Dibrugarh. TRIPURA : Provat Market, 27, Hariganga Basak Road, Agartola. MEGHALAYA : G.S. Road, Police Bazar, Shillong. U.P. : 24, Aminabad Park, Lucknow-1. Bengal Handloom, 646, Katra, Allahabad-2. 25/1, The Mall, Kanpur - 208004. D-36/264, August Kunda, Dasaswamedh Road, Varanasi - 221001. DELHI : 8, Meena Bazar, Progati Maidan, Lalbahadur Sastri Marg, New Delhi. MAHARASHTRA : 23, New Queen's Road, Near Roxy Cinema, Bombay-4. 2, Modi Lane, Sitabuldi, Nagpur-12. M.P. : Shop No. 40, Guru Teg Bahadur Complex, T.T. Nagar, Bhopal. 1110, Andhardeo, Jabalpur-482002. A.P. : Vasabi Nagar, Vasabi Seva Kendra, Vasabinagar, 8/1/91/16, Secretariat Road, Hyderabad-500004. KARNATAKA : C/o. Ganesh Complex, 13, Subedar Chatram Road, Bangalore-560009. TAMILNADU : Luz Show Room, 173, Luz Church Road, Mylapore, Madras. KERALA : 38/820A, Market Road, Ernakulam, Cochin-31, also in CALCUTTA and all over WEST BENGAL.

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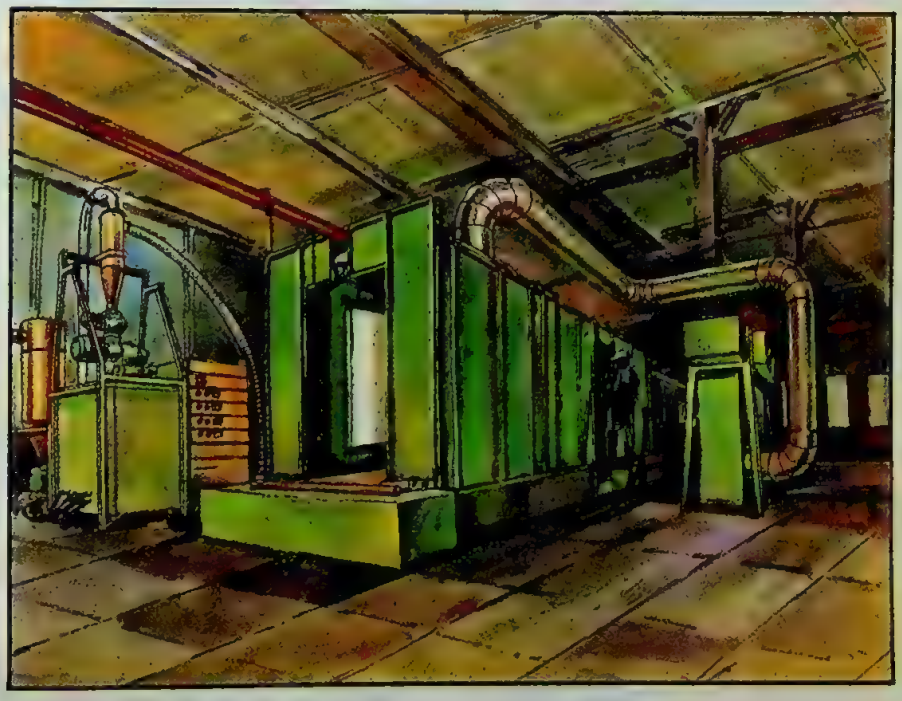
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Tapovan powerlooms (left) and a ward: unfortunate affair

LEPROSY

A Serious Setback

DR SHIVAJI Ganesh Patwardhan is 92 years old and most of those years have been spent clashing with the establishment and fighting social taboos. He was actively involved in the Independence struggle, was bold enough to send a team of Indian gymnasts to Germany in 1937 to demonstrate the effectiveness of Vyayam exercises and was courageous enough to voluntarily retire from public life when India came within hailing distance of freedom, in 1946. He retired to a quiet spot called Tapovan, in what is now Amravati district of Maharashtra where, over the last 37 years, he has built up one of the finest and most comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation complexes for leprosy patients. Last fortnight in a shocking development, Patwardhan closed down the ashram, the state Government hastily made arrangements to lodge the inmates elsewhere and the 'Old lion', as he is affectionately called went on a hunger strike.

The reason for this unfortunate state of affairs is money, or the lack of it. Early this year the state Government in its bureaucratic wisdom decided that only those leprosy patients coming under the aegis of the Public Health Department (PHD) would receive Rs 192 a month as capitation grant. This was according to the recommendations of the committee chaired by former state legislative council chairman R.S. Gavai, which added that the rest of the monthly cost of the patient's board and lodging—which works out to Rs 240 a month, going by the expenditure in government-run institutions—be paid by the institutions themselves. The snag as far as Tapovan goes is that only 700 of its 1,265 inmates could be properly considered for the grant—the rest are destitute children stricken with leprosy or prisoners who became victims of the disease in jail. Thus, over 500 of the inmates are under the new policy eligible only for grants ranging from Rs 65 to Rs 150.

Patwardhan refused to accept any money from the state Government when he learnt of the directive. Says he: "All other leprosy institutions may have accepted this pattern and all honour to them. But we find it restrictive and humiliating." His suggestion is to institute a grant of Rs 175 a month per patient.

The grants are not all that have angered the old man of Tapovan. Another is the recent row over the prices the state Government pays for the bandages, bedsheets and gauze manufactured by Tapovan's 128 handlooms and 49 powerlooms run by the inmates. The institution sells Rs 17 lakh worth of the material every year to the state Government on terms which include a 25 per cent mark-up over market rates and 90 per cent of the cost paid before delivery. Somebody in the Government objected to this arrangement and payments were halted. The result was that arrears piled up to Rs 9 lakh, the looms nearly closed down and Patwardhan had to make several pilgrimages to Bombay until the dispute was sorted out.

Patwardhan has not taken all this lying down. A confrontation took place in February this year. The month before the antiquated Leprosy Act of 1895 had been abolished and the Government sent a circular to Tapovan saying that as the Act had been repealed, Tapovan's lifetime inmates were now free to go wherever they wanted. Patwardhan retaliated in characteristic fashion: he took two truck-loads of leprosy patients to the houses of two Congress(I) MLA's and dumped them in their compounds. The Government quickly clarified that the lifetime inmates would continue to get the grants.

The current agitation is following much the same high-profile course. Patwardhan has already "surrendered" all the inmates to the Maharashtra Government. Gavai said last fortnight that Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil had told him that he would get the leprosy patients admitted to institutions elsewhere in the state. The impasse, however, shows no signs of easing.

But it would be a great pity if it were to continue for long because whatever the merits of Patwardhan's case for more money, there is no doubt that Tapovan is doing unique work. It is a bustling little community whose slogan proudly proclaims "We carry our own burden", and which includes everything from a 200-bed hospital and terminal patients wing to a flourishing loom section and primary and secondary school. Says S.G. Sahasrabhojane, former director of public relations, Maharashtra Government who now handles Tapovan's affairs in the state capital: "It is tragic that such a well-equipped ashram should be in trouble because of a dispute over money." Sahasrabhojani e's words are echoed by many others.

In the long run, the quarrel is alarming in its implications on the national anti-leprosy campaign. In a situation where every third leprosy patient in the world is an Indian, and 13 out of every 1,000 Maharashtrians is afflicted with the terrifying disease, the dream of eradicating it from India by the turn of the century seems very remote.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

Barriers of Bigotry

THEY are sad, strange stories to come out of secular India, easier to place in the narrow social and religious climate of 1924 rather than 1984. That they occur today, and can arouse the acrid passion of communal antagonism, is an indicator of how far the secular ideal enshrined in the Constitution has progressed in 37 years; how easily a person's fundamental right to marry out of free choice is violable by social and political pressures and how close the spectre of religious revival looms in the lives of people wanting to exercise that freedom. INDIA TODAY *Principal Correspondent* SUNIL SETHI *finds out how inter-religious marriages are being systematically obstructed by Hindu religious groups, and gives recent examples of cases in Aligarh and New Delhi:*

IN ALIGARH, the case of a young Hindu girl wishing to marry a Muslim lecturer polarises the town and brings it to the brink of a communal outburst. In New Delhi, another Hindu girl wanting to marry a Muslim fellow student under the Special Marriage Act—an ordinary civil marriage that is—is pressurised by Hindu religious groups and hounded out of town. In Agra, a Muslim girl wishing to marry a Hindu boy fails because, first, the boy's father is kept in police lock-up for two weeks after her father files an FIR charging abduction; then the girl is taken into custody and persuaded to change her mind. And the same administration that had issued a marriage certificate to the boy and girl in the first place—pleads that it cannot do a thing because the girl is a minor. They then declare the marriage null and void.

In all these cases—and hundreds of others which escape notice because the protagonists prefer anonymity—several factors are at work. The overriding one is that they are marrying out of religion; that, especially in conservative middle class situations, is bound to provoke parental displeasure. But while social pressure against inter-religious marriages has always existed; now Hindu religious groups have begun to cause institutional obstruction through social boycott, faking of marriage certificates and establishing false claims in marriage courts. These provocations can arouse a whole community, inflame a neighbourhood or even a city.

In Aligarh, Arya Samaj leaders recently announced a hunger strike in protest of a Hindu-Muslim marriage. "It was my duty as a law-abiding and good citizen to curb bad morals," explained a local Arya Samaj volunteer K.K. Navman. In New Delhi, members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the apex body of militant Hindu organisations, openly admit that they have a special "cell" functioning to obstruct such inter-religious marriages in court. Says B.L. Sharma, general secretary of the Indraprastha (Delhi) wing of the Parishad: "It pinches us that an Abdul Karim and not a Mohan Lal will be born out of such marriages."

The VHP's strategy to obstruct a Hindu-Muslim alliance is carefully organised. VHP workers employ the simple expedient of surveying, each week the lists put up on the notice-board of the marriage court in Delhi's Tees Hazari. As all couples registering for marriage under the Special Marriage Act have to observe the ritual of the public notice going up for a month, it is easy to spot inter-religious marriages. The girls's parents, usually opposed to the match, are tracked down; all sympathy and support offered in their opposition; and the girl often subjected to protracted humiliation by being incarcerated, segregated from the man she wishes to marry, beaten up by family members and coerced to change her mind. If prolonged subjugation does not work, VHP volunteers admit that they raise objections in the marriage court by claiming that the girl has already been married before, in accordance with Hindu rites. "Sometimes we get the local Arya Samaj temple to issue a fake certificate for such a marriage," says a VHP volunteer, who has been "designated" to hinder as many of these marriages as possible. By the time the court asks for further proof of the non-existent marriage and the case drags on month after month, the girl's resistance is worn thin. So is the boy's. Depending on the struggle she has had to put up—the emotional blackmail of parents, of the community, of the do-gooding types that descend from the Arya Samaj or VHP—the girl may acquiesce.

Or she may persist if

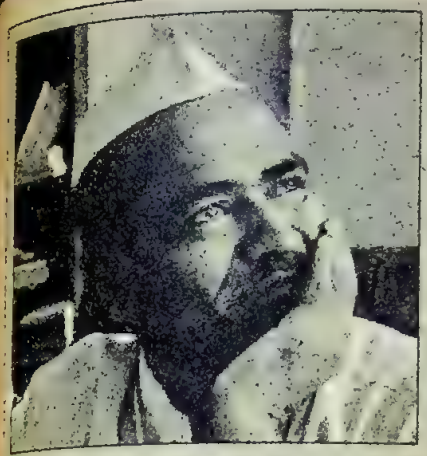
RAGHU RAI



Idris Siddiqui and Abha Sharma

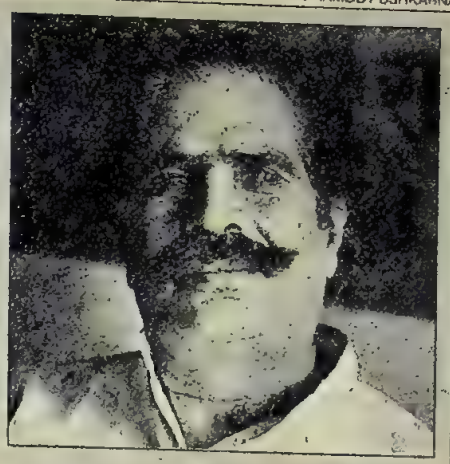
"Things will never be the same for us in Aligarh. We fear for our jobs, for our safety. We have become a scandal."

RAGHU RAI



K.K. Navman, Arya Samaj leader

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



B.L. Sharma, general secretary Vishwa Hindu Parishad

"Social pressure against inter-religious marriages has always existed; now, Hindu religious groups have begun to cause institutional obstruction through social boycott, faking of marriage certificates and establishing false claims in marriage courts.

backed by inner determination to carry her personal decision through. "Usually they elope and convert to marry, exactly the opposite of what the religious organisation had hoped for," says Rukmani Rao, member of Saheli, a women's resource centre in New Delhi which frequently comes across such cases. Adds Prabeen Grewal of the same organisation: "What we're fighting for in these cases is secular rights, and also the individual right of a person to live safely in a place, rather than be uprooted and hounded out because of social pressure."

RAJESHWAR, the working president and trustee of the VHP, a kindly-looking, soft-spoken man, denies that the VHP has "raised objections in a court of law to prevent such marriages". Nevertheless, he alleges that when cases of Hindu girls marrying Muslims occur, "our girls are not to blame—Muslims are well-trained to deceive them". He issues homilies on the better grounding Muslim and Christian children receive in their religious precepts in comparison to Hindu children and, at the drop of a hat, will produce a passage from the Quran that suggest that unless the "idolators" repent and "establish worship" (i.e. convert) they should be slain. His deputy in the VHP, B.L. Sharma, goes further to say that "Hindu families are slowly being ruined by a Muslim conspiracy", to breed more Muslims through such inter-religious marriages. He considers it his duty to prevent these alliances, and quotes the ancient statesman Chanakya's principles of causing interpersonal friction: "*Saam, Daam, Dand, Bhed*," he intones in Hindi, meaning that pressures must be applied through coercion, money, punishment and, finally, conspiracy. Sharma further adds that the VHP is about to start a Marriage Bureau Centre in Delhi which will take up obstructing these marriages in a better-organised manner. But it is significant that both men echo the same number of such marriages taking place in Delhi; they place the figure at about 350 a year but won't say how many they have intervened in with any degree of success.

From Saheli, details of several such cases are available. In many, the girls involved, whether they successfully married or were restrained, fight shy of speaking about a part of their lives they consider private. But there are cases that become public because of the resistance put up by the girl—such as that of Anjani Verma, a student of Jamia Millia University in New Delhi. She fell in love with a fellow student called Istafa and was prevented from marrying him earlier this year due to pressure from Hindu organisations. In Anjani's case, when members of Saheli found out that she was being kept in her parental home under duress, they sought to free her. The girl came with them willingly. Not only was the Saheli office deluged with threatening and abusive calls from members of the Arya Samaj and VHP, but her marriage notice was obstructed in court. "They produced a Arya Samaj wedding certificate to claim that she was already married. They refused to bring the girl to court. The marriage officer himself was put under pressure to revoke Anjani and Istafa's marriage application," says Saheli member Abha Bhaiya who fought for her. In the end, Anjani simply ran away with the man she wished to marry, converted, married him, and the couple now live in Aligarh.

While her mother Pushpa Rani Verma will not say very much about what happened and only denounce it as a "conspiracy", Anjani's letter to Saheli explaining her action is a sad testament of her emotional plight. "I want to inform you that I have got married according to Muslim rules on June 25, 1984," it reads, "I know you said we should wait for the decision of the magistrate but the tension is too much... these people fighting all kinds of false cases and issuing certificates...these procedures could go on for years and our lives would be ruined. We have got married and are leaving Delhi."

The most recent case of Abha Sharma and Idris Siddiqui of Aligarh, is also the most graphic. It concerns two sane, educated, determined adults who have been through a harrowing ordeal and are now willing to make their troubles public. And it highlights how, in towns with a substantial Muslim population like Aligarh, vested and communal interests can swoop upon their situation to ignite the whole town. Abha, 22, is a student of M. Phil. at Aligarh Muslim University. The daughter of a block development officer, she has had an excellent academic record and is a sociable, lively person, and well-known on the campus. Last year she met Idris Siddiqui, a 30-year-old lecturer in Economics at the university and, what was at first a casual friendship, gradually developed into a serious relationship.

On several occasions they considered marriage but knew, given their conservative middle class backgrounds, that they would meet with opposition. "I knew for a fact my parents would never permit me," she says. "I was determined not to live in Aligarh after marrying Abha," he says. Nevertheless, his job was in Aligarh, and she was a student there. In a bid to certify their relationship legally, the two decided sometime last year to get married secretly under the Special Marriage Act. They first approached the marriage officer in Aligarh, only to be refused on the grounds that it could become a dangerous issue. They then contacted the marriage

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officer of Bulandshahar through a friend, in the hope that he would entertain their application. He too refused; finally, in a determined bid to contract a legal marriage, under which they were under no compunction to change their religions, the two managed to persuade the marriage officer in Idris's home town of Lakimpur Kheri. Having given notice to him last September, they managed to slip away on January 27 this year and become legally wedded.

Incredibly enough, their courage failed them to break the news to their families, and Abha returned to live at home with her parents. It was not till six months later that her parents found evidence of her relationship with Idris, and she confessed to them her marriage. Their reaction was predictably strong: refusing to accept her marriage, they also refused to let her attend college, her only meeting ground for being reunited with her lawful husband. Soon after she became sick; unable to reach her, and frantic with worry at her state, Idris sought the ultimate recourse. Arriving in New Delhi, he filed a habeas corpus petition in the Supreme Court asking for his wife to be presented. On August 2, the Supreme Court bench, comprising of Justices S.M. Fazal Ali, A. Varadarajan and S. Mukharji, rejected his appeal on the grounds that it was hard to believe that an educated girl of sane mind could be separated from her husband and kept prisoner in her parents' home. "I was laughed out of court," says Idris bitterly. In desperation, he sought the help of social workers at Saheli, two of whom arrived in Aligarh the following day and under the auspices of the additional city magistrate, were able to extricate Abha from her parents' home.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"If girls are compelled to convert to Islam to marry, they stand to lose their rights under Muslim Personal Law which makes remarriage easier for the man."

RUKMANI RAO, *Saheli volunteer*

THE COUPLE were at last reunited in Delhi, but not before the real trouble broke out. Returning to live in Idris' home in Aligarh, the couple became the victims of a public controversy with the local Arya Samaj getting into the act. A distant relative of Abha's, a journalist called Nand Kishore, began to publish scurrilous reports about her "abduction" in a Hindi newspaper called *Vikasheel Bharat*. Her photograph was circulated; posters began to appear speaking of a "kidnapping of a Hindu girl by Muslim goondas" and local leaders like K.K. Navman persuaded the girl's mother to go on hunger strike at the Arya Samaj temple in protest. Navman, a publisher who proudly admits to being involved in every communal situation in Aligarh, continues to believe that "Abha and Idris' marriage was a conspiracy on part of the administration—they have been blackmailed and, possibly, hypnotised."

However, his opposition to such alliances, like those of VHP leaders in Delhi, is focussed on conversion of unsuspecting Hindu girls to Islam. He quotes marriages of well-known film stars as a precedent. "When Reena Roy marries Mohsin Khan, she remains Reena Roy no longer. But when Nargis married Sunil Dutt, she continued to remain Nargis." Like VHP members he sees no objection to such marriages if, in the words of VHP chief Rajeshwar, "the girl can amicably convert the boy to Hinduism." It is precisely such bigotry that members of Saheli are fighting and which the Special Marriage Act is designed to circumvent. Says Rukmani Rao, "If girls are, in fact, compelled to convert to Islam to marry, as in Anjani Verma's case, they stand to lose out their rights under the Muslim Personal Law which makes remarriage easier for the man."

The District Magistrate in Aligarh, P.L. Punia, who had to undertake elaborate precautions in the Abha-Idris *cause celebre* which threatened to become a communal flashpoint (among other moves he had to summon a press conference in which Abha Sharma claimed her marriage in public) also points out flaws in the implementation of the Special Marriage Act. Unlike in larger towns, where marriage officers are full-fledged magistrates, any practising advocate in a smaller town can apply to become a marriage officer with sanction from the state law department. This has led to a flourishing industry in extortion and blackmail by corrupt marriage officers, who are known to demand large sums of money from apprehensive couples or threaten to arouse public censure by sneaking on them.

Other than elevating the lowered legal standards of marriage officers, the issue at the heart of these affairs is social. The emotional wreckage caused in each case is harder to redeem. In the Abha-Idris marriage, for example, the degree of social prejudice rampant is evident in the words of Abha's mother, Sunita Sharma. Weeping bitterly at her loss of "self-respect", she claims that their marriage certificate is a "forgery" and the whole incident a conspiracy to convert innocent girls to Islam. "It's organised crime," she says. "I made such a noise about my daughter because it should warn other parents to save their daughters from such abductions." Abha and Idris, on the other hand, fear social reprisals—the subtle, unspoken shunning that comes from being involved in a "public-scandal"—if they return to Aligarh. "It will never be the same again," says Idris, "at my job or in my home."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"What we are fighting for in these cases is secular rights, and also the individual right of a person to live safely in a place, without fear of being hounded out."

PRABEEN GREWAL, *Saheli volunteer*

The scandal, of course, lies in such marriages being regarded as a "scandal" today. Just as the Supreme Court bench refused to accept that, in this day and age, a girl of sane mind and sound education could be prevented from making a legal liaison of her choice, there are those seemingly unaware that these situations exist, everywhere. It is an aspect of Indian social mores crumbling, regressing, and a revealing indication of the spread of religious revivalism.

—SUNIL SETHI

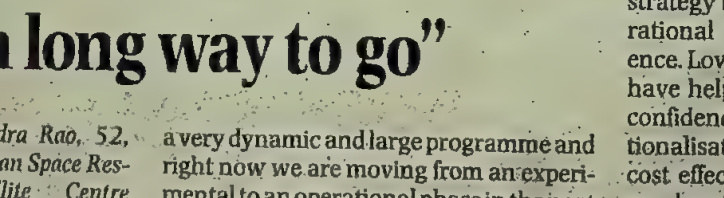
SPACE

A Smooth Succession

FEW SUCCESSIONS in India's sluggish bureaucracy have been so smooth, well planned and non- controversial as the one last fortnight when the silver-haired Professor Satish Dhawan handed over charge of the prestigious posts of secretary, Space Department, and chairman Space Commission, to the balding and diminutive Professor U.R. Rao. Dhawan, who turned 64 last month, had been grooming Rao for the post for the last three years. Indications of this came when Rao was inducted into the six-member Space Commission, the high power policy making body in August 1982. Then in April this year, when Dhawan was down with a sore throat which prevented him from speaking, Rao led the Space Department team to Moscow to observe Rakesh Sharma making his historic space flight. So when the terse announcement was made last month about Rao's appointment as head of India's sprawling space research organisation, few eyebrows were raised and fewer grumblings heard.

If there was any surprise and regret, it was only that Dhawan, who has headed the Indian Space Research Organisation ever since it was formed in 1972, had finally decided to call it a day. Such was the pressure on him to continue despite two extensions in service that Dhawan, who was keen on getting out, reluctantly agreed to stay on as senior advisor to the Space Department with the rank of a Union secretary. This unique position was created to ensure that he would be around to guide Rao till he learned all the ropes. Rao himself is thankful for Dhawan's reassuring presence because, as he told INDIA TODAY (*see interview*): "Professor Dhawan's contribution has been absolutely fantastic. This has put me into serious problems because the shoes are big and I hope with the cooperation of my colleagues I will be able to fit into them."

Dhawan handing over charge to Rao



Rao will certainly have a lot of growing to do to fit into Dhawan's shoes. For to Dhawan goes the credit of transforming the late Vikram Sarabhai's dream of a dynamic space programme for India into a reality. When Dhawan took over in June 1972, after Sarabhai's sudden death, the Space Department was still a fledgling unit with ambitious plans, a few isolated pockets of inspired research and a conspicuous lack of man-

INTERVIEW

"We have a long way to go"

WHEN Udipi Ramachandra Rao, 52, took over as director of the Indian Space Research Organisation Satellite Centre (ISAC) in 1972, the centre was housed under asbestos-roofed industrial sheds in Peenya, a small village near Bangalore city, with a staff strength of 100. Today ISAC has shifted to more permanent, concrete structures and now employs 1,500 people. It has designed and built seven satellites and is now in the process of building more sophisticated satellites of INSAT class. Rao, a cosmic ray scientist of eminence, has largely been responsible for the ISAC's tremendous growth. Last week soon after he took over as head of India's Space Department, Rao took time off to talk to INDIA TODAY correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA about his plans. Excerpts:

Q. How does it feel to take over as head of the Space Department? Is it with a feeling of apprehension or confidence?

A. It is a mixed feeling really. Certainly apprehensions are there because we have a very dynamic and large programme and right now we are moving from an experimental to an operational phase in the next decade. We still have to go very far. Professor Dhawan's contribution has been absolutely fantastic. This has put me into serious problems because the shoes are big and I hope with the cooperation of my colleagues I will be able to fit into them.

Q. Are you planning any radical changes in our space programmes?

A. The space profile for this decade has already been approved by the Government and I have been a party to it. The profile doesn't change because a person changes. If that happens it would be disastrous for any organisation. Mid-course manoeuvres are fine depending on the progress, but there are going to be no drastic changes in the basic programme.

Q. Do you think the space programme is running on a sound track? Did we adopt the right strategies?

A. We have adopted the right kind of strategy because you do not get into operational systems without some experience. Low cost experimental programmes have helped in this and now having got confidence we are moving into the operationalisation stage. It has been the most cost effective way of doing it. Wherever one has tried to jump this it has always been a bad experience. Today INSAT's services have become as vital as water and electricity. So we cannot afford failures and we must get in after a sufficient amount of preparation.

Q. At what stage of the space programme are we in now?

A. Right now we are at the take-off the operational stage. We have built up an enormous capability of the organisation so that we can now with some confidence get on with the operational systems which require a tremendous amount of reliability.

Q. Do you think we are moving at our fastest pace, especially when compared with other countries that have made rapid strides in space?

A. Firstly, let me clarify that we are not involved in the space race. We have no ambitions to compete with other

wer and organisation. Dhawan quickly
rted building up areas vital to space res-
rch such as designing and testing pock-
s to launch spacecrafts, building satel-
es and ground facilities to track them
d devising techniques of making their
ginal use for India's developmental pro-
mmes. If Dhawan succeeded in a large
easure it was because of his tremendous
ganisational capabilities, his stature as a
liant scientist and his rapport with
me Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi. As one
ce scientist put it: "When the old man
ke people listened."

DHAWAN was able to convert an eso-
teric subject like space into a na-
tional priority and in the process got
ery key department involved. He was
willing to confine the space programme
the multi-storey complexes of the Space
partment that dot the country. Instead,
started reaching out to other depart-
ents and agencies. Early enough he rea-
d that there could be no viable space
gramme without the backing of Indian
dustry. It is because of his efforts that
o major public sector units like Hin-
stan Aeronautics Limited and Bharat
ctronics Limited, as well as a large
mber of private industrial units have
en involved in building Indian space-
fts. If the Indian national satellite system which is now known more by its acronym INSAT, is well under way of being established it was primarily because Dhawan roped in such user agencies as the Information & Broadcasting Ministry and the Posts and Telegraphs Department and got them actively involved in the space programme. J.P. Singh, INSAT programme director, says effusively: "Professor Dhawan is indeed the prime architect of India's space programme."

Though India is still among the second runners in the space race, due to Dhawan's leadership it now has the potential of becoming a major space power in the 1990s. India is already a member of the exclusive space club of countries having the technology to launch satellites. In 1980 when it successfully put the Rohini Satellite into orbit on the indigenously built SLV 3, it became the seventh country in the world to achieve that feat. Right now after successfully designing, building and testing seven satellites it has the capability of making satellites of the INSAT class. Dhawan leaves at a time when India has successfully completed the experimental stage in satellite technology and is poised to move into the fully operational phase in which it will be able to build and launch its own satellites.

On Rao's shoulders falls the enormous task of taking India into the fully operational stage. It is going to be one of the most crucial periods of India's space programme. Next year the space research organisation plans to send up the ASLV (augmented satellite launch vehicle) that will upgrade India's satellite launching capability. In 1986 the Indian remote sensing satellite, IRS 1A, is to be sent up by a Soviet spacecraft, which, if successful, would confirm India's capability of building spacecrafts for remote sensing of the country's natural resources and for use in agriculture, forestry and geology.

The space organisation has also set itself the awesome task of building and launching satellites of INSAT class by 1992 and Rao will have to ensure that it is fulfilled. A sombre Dhawan in his simple farewell letter to the 9,000-strong staff of the space organisation hinted at these tasks ahead when he said: "The Indian space programme is a complex, difficult, exciting and challenging endeavour. The programme ahead for the '90s is clear. There will be problems and difficulties as before but I have full faith that you can overcome them." For a man who believed in doing his duty so religiously that his colleagues called him the "Karma yogi of the Space Department" it was the only way he could bid goodbye—by urging them to carry on the work he had so single-mindedly done for more than a decade. —RAJ CHENGAPPA

...s to put a man on the moon. We are
...g to build our space programme to
...own special requirements for deve-
...ment. You can't hurry up much in
...se kinds of things. Beyond a certain
...d your hastening will only hurt the
...ecraft as well as make it less cost effec-
...It is a very sensitive trade off between
...o and I don't think we could have
...e quicker. We are moving at the right

*Q. What are the major achievements
...e Space Department so far?*

A. The major achievement has been
...fructification of its integration pro-
...which has built linkages be-
...the launch vehicle on one side, the
...ace technology on the third. Our
...e programmes too are all tied down
...These inter-links. Take rockets for inst-
...e, we have moved from sounding roc-
...to SLV-3 and now to PSLV (polar satel-
...launch vehicle) and the same stepp-
...-step process with satellites. The com-
...ility between launch vehicles and
...ecraft has always been kept and this
...s from careful programming. The
...s too have been integrated in the pro-


RAJ CHENGAPPA

We are trying to build our space programme to our own special requirements for development. We are moving at the right pace.

gramme because what is the use of a spacecraft if it can't be used by the user. The hallmark of the space programme is its integrated approach which is a wholesome and holistic attitude and not just to achieve quick results.

Q. But if this is true then why are user agencies failing to fully utilise INSAT-1B? The quality of Doordarshan's programme has hardly changed despite having 150-odd stations. Nor has the telecommunication revolution arrived. Why haven't these gone hand in hand?

A. I don't agree with you here. If you go hand in hand then you will have to have all the ground stations working well before the satellite goes up. The amount of expenditure is huge. So a phased plan like what the Posts and Telegraphs or Doordarshan are doing is the best way. Right now there are still uncertainties in the launching of satellites. So you can't put up all the stations and wait for the satellite to go up. There has to be a trade-off between the two.

Q. Why are Indian space scientists chary of talking about the military implications of satellite technology?

A. Our space programme is based on peaceful applications. When we are not using it for defence purposes how can we talk about it? Our entire profile is very open and there is not one element of military business. None of our satellites has so far been designed for spying. We are not doing it.

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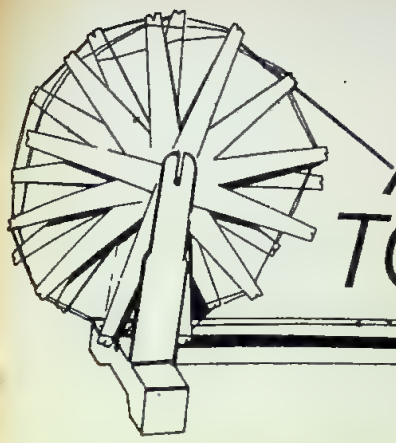
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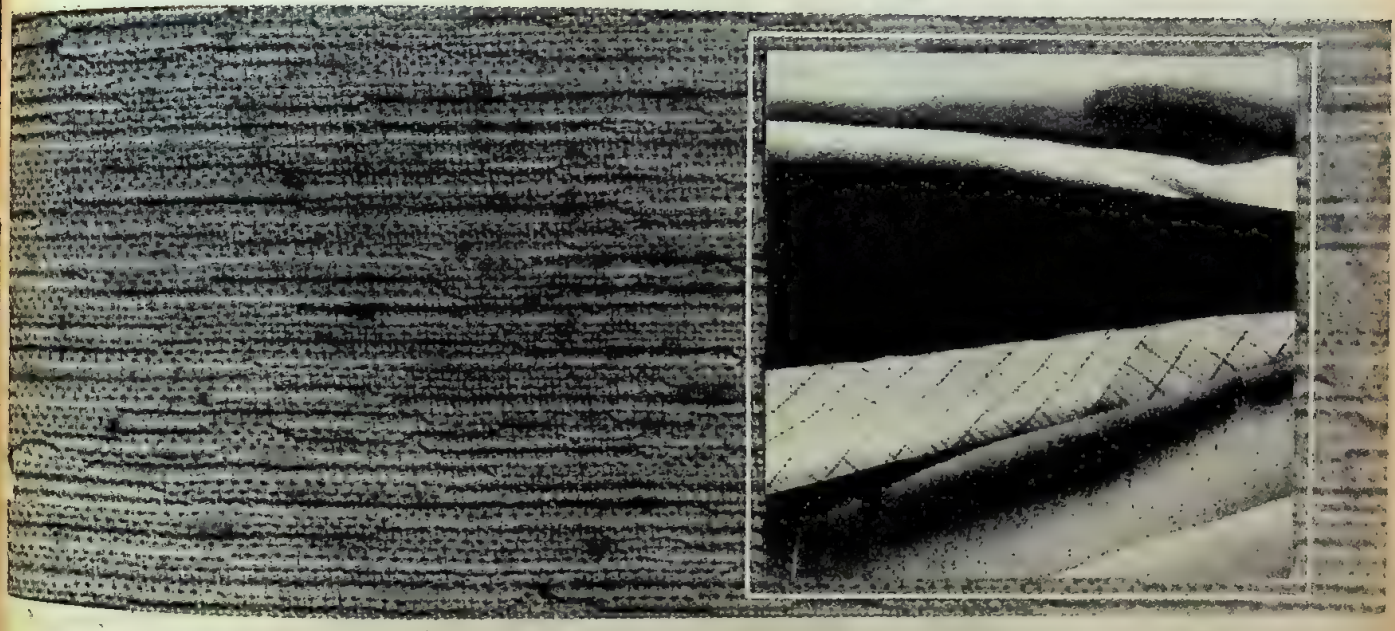
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RHINOS

Horns of a Dilemma

THE JALDAPARA Wildlife Sanctuary in north Bengal, the only major preserve of the Great Indian Rhinoceros besides the better-known Kaziranga preserve in Assam (INDIA TODAY, March 31) is fast losing its battle against rhino horn hunters and encroachment from neighbouring settlements. Only a couple of decades ago, as many as 72 rhinos roamed the grassy savannahs of this 115 sq km sanctuary. Today, only about 22 remain. Three were killed this year alone.

Watching this steady depredation are the Jaldapara forest officials, who feel impotent in the face of their twin enemies: poachers and woodcutters. "As long as a rhino horn fetches its weight in gold, poaching is going to continue no matter what we do," says a forest official hopelessly. Even the busting of a major poaching gang operating in Assam and north Bengal three months ago does not seem to have deterred the poachers—the third rhino was killed at Jaldapara shortly after the crackdown. "We are fighting an octopus-like organisation which is not the least affected by the loss of one of its parts," confides Jalpaiguri district Police Superintendent R.K. Johri.



A rhino in the sanctuary: poachers' prey

Each part of the poaching operation, from the shooting of the animal to the final delivery of its horn to buyers in Hong Kong, is executed by different persons, not one of whom is allowed to have any connection with another. Thus no link in this poaching chain can be effectively cut without first apprehending one of the top-level coordinators. For instance the forest ranger at Jaldapara, Dhruba Ranjan Sarkar, knows who the sharpshooters in his area are, but, he says: "When we go to arrest them we find no evidence. The shooter is supplied the gun only when the rhino is in sight."

The only way to put an end to poaching, says Sarkar, is to allow forest officials "to shoot a few well-known offenders while they are on a rhino's trail" Forest rangers can shoot poachers only in self-defence, which as he says indignantly, means "we have to get close enough to them so that they can first have a shot at us before we can consider shooting them in turn." The murder of a young forest officer, Biswanath Mukherjee, last year in the Buxa forest division (of which Jaldapara is a part) has taught forest officials not to be over-zealous on the job.

But the biggest hurdle in the way of anti-poaching measures seems to be the total lack of cooperation from villagers living around the sanctuary. "Till five or six years ago, the villagers would always cooperate with us and give us advance information on the plans of local sharpshooters," recalls Sarkar. But a rising population and increasing landlessness have forced the same villagers to turn to the forest for a livelihood. They regularly enter the forest for fodder, firewood and the coveted khair tree (*Acacia catechu*) which grows in abundance in the sanctuary. Villagers also earn an occasional rupee by passing on information about the whereabouts of rhinos to the poachers.

Forest officials, however, are fearful of taking any action against the aggressive villagers, who enter the forest in hordes. "We usually have to run for our lives to escape from villagers armed with swords and knives," says a junior beat officer at Jaldapara. The encroachers are secure in their conviction that the forest guards will never shoot, especially after what happened in February this year. At that time the Moiradanga beat officer shot dead a poacher who had killed a rhino in the sanctuary. "The villagers created such a problem, entering the forest and creating havoc, threatening to finish us off, that the beat officer finally had to flee from Jaldapara," recounts Sarkar.

It has lately dawned on the authorities that this impasse will end only if the villagers can be involved in the upkeep of the sanctuary. "We intend to siphon rural development funds to these villages so that landless families have an alternative source of income and don't need to enter the forests," says Bengal's Chief Conservator of Forests, Shankar Narayan Misra, outlining a plan that aims at using the state Forest Department as the nodal agency for the development of villages in the forest areas of north Bengal. The Central Government has been requested to help by including this programme in the Seventh Five Year Plan.

That may be a part of the solution, but as District Commissioner, G. Balagopal points out, what is needed is a "Project Rhino". At the rate at which rhinos are vanishing from north Bengal there will be none left by the time the state Government's long-term programmes begin taking effect. Balagopal says the second Project Tiger in West Bengal has been set up in Buxa, near the Indo-Bhutan border and tigers are proliferating there.

Ironically, an increasing tiger population is partially responsible for the rhino's decline at Jaldapara. Sarkar has discovered evidence of tigers attacking rhino calves by following pug marks. "The tiger follows a rhino with her calf for days until it gets an opportunity to injure the calf, which is eventually abandoned by the mother," he says. Forest officials have estimated that at least two calves are born in Jaldapara every year. Even with poaching—about 40 rhinos have been killed here in the last 8 years—the rhino population would not have declined to just 22 from 72 in 1964 had the tiger population not increased from two to 12 during the same period.

With both man and nature pitted against the rhino, attempts to prevent this vulnerable pachyderm's slide to extinction have paid few dividends. The only options left are: The starting of a "Project Rhino" or the more drastic one of allowing forest officials to shoot anyone entering the sanctuary illegally.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Jaldapara.



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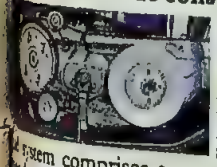
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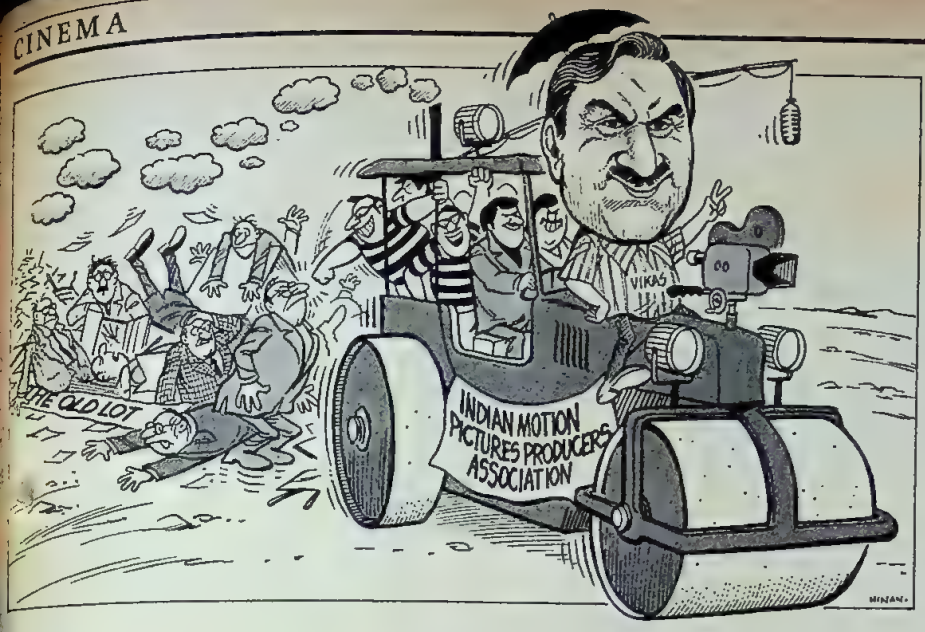
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IMPPA

Producing a Potboiler

NO POT-BOILER served up by the steamy studios of Bombay is ever complete without *dishum-dishum*. Therefore it is only fitting that fights *à la* Shetty be a part of real-life as they are of reel life. But even by such standards, the current war of producers is unusually bloody. Last month, in the annual elections to the executive committee of the powerful Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association (IMPPA) Shree Ram Bohra was hustled off the president's pedestal by an electoral *hava* which saw most of his friends on the committee bite the dust. The winners were Ramraj Nahata and his newly-formed Democratic Group which took 12 of the 16 seats at stake. As a jubilant Nahata said later: "Bohra had been ruling IMPPA for the last 12 years and it was time that some fresh blood came in."

It must have been galling for Bohra to lose one of the most powerful positions in the industry after ruling the roost for 12 long years. But what must be even more galling is that he was outsmarted by a man who was a nobody a year ago: Vikas Mohan, a fast-talking Punjabi parvenu who is general secretary of the Film Producers' Welfare Organisation (FPWO) formed with the blessings of the Shiv Sena, whose strongmen were crucial to his well-publicised raids on video libraries. Later, Mohan cosied up to a powerful producer responsible for Indian cinema's biggest hit, garnered enough friends to put together the Democratic Group and trounced Bohra's ruling group in the IMPPA elections. Crowed Mohan: "Our friends in the industry realised that only we could deliver the goods and voted for us." Retorts the usually slow-talking Bohra in almost apoplectic rage: "He won this election through manipulation of votes. Who is Vikas Mohan? We got the Anti-Video Copyright Act through Parliament."

The video piracy issue was, in fact, the beginning of the current war. With little to prevent them from doing so, the video libraries were having a field-day even as Bohra and others struggled to get a stringent copyright act through Parliament. The FPWO grabbed the limelight with dramatic midnight raids on video libraries. Whether they did anything to curb piracy is debatable but they certainly gave Mohan a very high profile.

Mohan began his campaign by saying that Bohra was not entitled to be president of IMPPA because he was not a member. As he tells it, a cheque for the subscription of eight of Bohra's or Bohra-related concerns was presented sometime last year but was never cashed so that Bohra was technically not even a member of the association. Bohra counters this by saying that if the treasurer was lazy enough not to cash his cheque, that was not his fault. Says he: "These are all lies. They have created a scandal out of nothing." Retorts Mohan: "They paid the subscription—Rs 4,700—later in cash."

Unhappily for Bohra, this particular mudball struck him a couple of months before the elections on September 18—the second blow sent him reeling. This related to a 16-storey, 96-flat residential apartment complex called Movie Tower situated in the suburbs. This was the brainchild of the All India Film Producers' Council (AIFPC) but was later passed on to Bohra and his close colleague, fellow producer T.C. Dewan as promoters, because the AIFPC was not legally entitled to carry out such an enterprise. Mohan lost no time in screaming that Bohra and Dewan were up to something and were making a packet on the side from the sale of flats—which, incidentally, were sold for almost half the market rates. Bohra's angry and spirited denial of any fraud and his assertion that all accounts and records were open to scrutiny came a little too late.

The Democratic Group was formed in a rush a few days before the elections. The Bohra group alleges that there was a considerable amount of hanky-panky in the voting. Says Dewan: "It was clearly rigged. About 70 or 80 people who never come for any election came this time. Their subscription was paid with one hand even as they voted with the other." He admits, however, that "our people had become very complacent and had not worked hard enough for victory".

Bohra and his friends are waiting for another election but at the moment the objective seems to be to get Mohan. The giant-killer himself appears to be in for a fair amount of trouble within his own FPWO. For one there are two FPWO's now: Mohan's with a letter-head adorned by a dancing Nataraj and claiming to be "an organisation for the welfare of producers and the film industry" and the original presided over by Gajanand Shirke, a Marathi producer known to be close to the Shiv Sena whose letter-head is adorned by the Sena's roaring lion and which claims to be "a wing of Shiv Sena chitrapat shakah". Mohan and Shirke have expelled each other from the FPWO, and both have set up different treasurers. Shirke in his letter to Mohan has accused him, among other things, of opening a "forged account in some bank in the name of our organisation by forging signatures". Mohan in his letter has demanded an unconditional apology within seven days and claimed damages of Rs 5 lakh.

Whatever the truth of their respective allegations and charges there is no doubt that IMPPA is in for some unusual activity. Says Nahata: "We have set up 20 committees to go into various aspects of this organisation's earlier functioning." The idea is obviously to store up enough mud to be used as and when the need arises. The other group is also putting aside enough ammunition. Barring a last minute reconciliation the next few weeks should see more fur and legal notices fly.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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NAGESWARA RAO

Evergreen Hero

HE HAS been around longer than Dev Anand or Dilip Kumar. His 216th film was released last month. Two of his films have been screened in film festivals in Madrid and Sydney and no less than 30 have recorded silver jubilee runs. Last fortnight, he celebrated his 60th birthday. Who is he?

As a film-related quiz, that question would stump quite a few film buffs— outside the south, that is. Any child south of the Vindhyas could rattle off the answer without pause for thought: Akkineni Nageswara Rao. Right now, his closest rival on the southern screen, N.T.Rama Rao, may hold centre stage, but in purely cinematic terms, Nageswara Rao is literally reels ahead in both output and popularity.

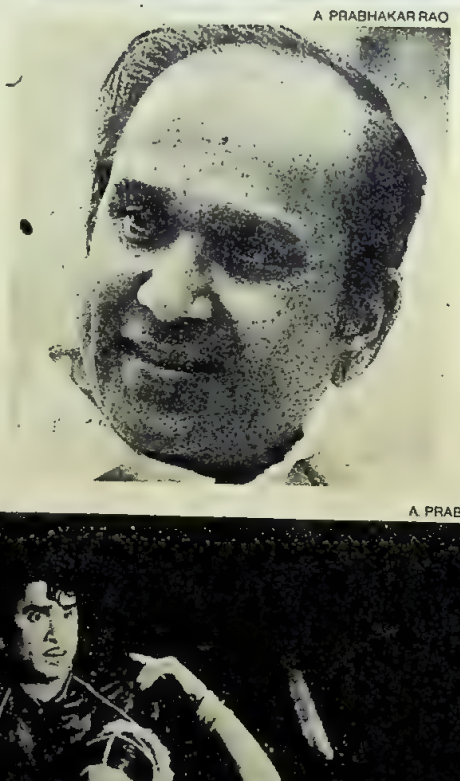
In fact, the two have very little in common except for their protracted dominance over the Telugu screen and the fact that both come from Andhra. NTR's cinematic career has revolved mainly around mythological roles, Nageswara Rao still revels in playing the romantic hero in typical masala films packed with song and dance sequences. Age has not slowed him down and with 10 films still in hand, he emphatically vows to continue to play romantic leads "as long as it doesn't embarrass me or others if I were to watch the film later with my family".

His diversity of roles and his versatility still continue to astound. He played a thief-turned-policeman in *Bandipotu Dongalu*, an orthodox poet in *Meghasandesam*, an itinerant traveller in search of spiritual fulfillment in *Batasari* and a sculptor in *Amarasilpi Takkanna*. His epic roles include such classics as *Kalidasa*, *Laila Majnu*, *Anarkali* and *Devadas*. Says Telugu film critic G.S.Vardachari: "Though he is an agnostic, ANR excels in mythological or religious roles simply because he is a perfectionist."

Nageswara Rao modestly ascribes his success to "discipline and hard work" but his co-workers in the industry grant him much more credit than he claims. Says veteran producer D.Madhusudana Rao: "His advantage lies in the intense study he makes of every character he plays, his ability to figure out every frame in the context of the film's totality." Adds cameraman B.A.Subba Rao: "ANR has a highly mobile face and he never treats a single shot as trivial."



R.N. NAGARAJA RAO



A. PRABHAKAR RAO



A. PRABHAKAR RAO

ANR (left) with Savithri (above) and Jayamalini (below)

Unlike established stars who have passed middle age, Nageswara Rao still insists on maintaining perfect physical trim, one reason why he can still, at 60, play opposite heroines young enough to be his daughters.

The youngest of nine children born into a farm family, Nageswara Rao lost three of his brothers, his only sister and his father when he was still a child. He started off as a child actor on the Telugu stage but switched to playing female roles in cinema at his mother's urging. She had always wanted her daughter to join films and when she died, the little boy was dressed up in female garments and packed off to the sets straight from school. When still in class seven, he was spotted at Vijayawada railway station by pioneer Telugu film producer Ghantasala Balaramayya who was looking for a junior artiste for his film *Dharmapatni*. That film ran for over 100 days and Nageswara Rao has not looked back since and his prodigious output includes 195 Telugu films, 25 Tamil and one Hindi film, *Suvarna Sundari* which ran for more than 25 weeks.

His versatility and popularity have naturally brought hordes of producers flocking to the doorstep of his mansion in Hyderabad's plush Banjara

...ilms, but the veteran actor stoutly refuses to sign more than five films a year. Says writer-director-producer Dasari Narayana Rao: "He gets tremendous satisfaction from acting and he does not behave as if he were only doing it for money." Nageswara Rao now spends 10 hours a day on shooting and attends to his business interests at night. And attends to his business interests at the Annapurna Studios on the outskirts of Hyderabad and returns home by 7 p.m. to spend the evening with his family. Every year, he insists on taking two months off for a vacation with his family.

None of his five children are keen on following their father's footsteps though they are all partners in the film production and distribution companies and the studios that form only a small part of the family business which includes investments in a farm, fluorescent powder making units, flour mills, an industrial foil factory and an offset printing press. His total business assets are estimated to be in the region of Rs 25 crore.

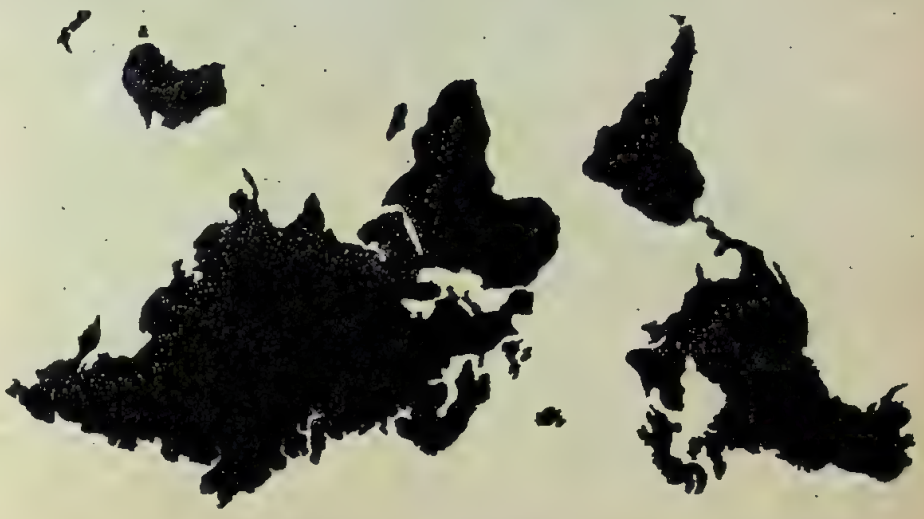
But Nageswara Rao's enormous popularity lies in his humanity and humility. Says actress Jamuna: "He is more humane than most film stars and cordial with all his heroines even when women were not taken seriously in Telugu films." Even now, he receives busloads of fans at his house without any outward show of superiority or arrogance. Says he: "I am always thankful to them for they keep us going whether things are good or bad." He confesses that he has not seen 54 of his films because it will disturb me because of the poor acting."

Nageswara Rao is also a generous and altruistic man. He ploughed back profits into the film industry to encourage the shifting of the Telugu film capital from Madras to Hyderabad and still sets aside money every year to donate to colleges and universities. But despite all this, it is surprising that he is still to receive a national award. Typically, Nageswara Rao remains unaffected. Says he: "I never believe in targets. Film acting is a profession like any other and I put in my best. If I were good, I wouldn't have been around for 60 years."

Unlike NTR, he has no interest in politics. "Politics is a cold-blooded heartless operation that numbs the senses. There are better joys in life. But retiring from films will mean my death. I wish to die and be remembered as an actor and continue to live in the hearts of the people long after I have gone." As a peculiar piece of film dialogue this will be difficult to match. But coming from Nageswara Rao, it somehow sounds unquestionably sincere.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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UNNAYAN



Map by B K SHARMA



A newly laid railway track: human hurdles

CALCUTTA

Squatters' Rites

WHILE most Calcuttans celebrated Durga Puja last fortnight, a few thousand destitute squatters living along the disused railway tracks in the city's crowded Baghbazar area were verbally informed that they would have to find new homes shortly. The eviction notice was not, however, a bolt from the blue. The unfortunate squatters knew that they were scheduled to be thrown out of their shanties to make way for the Union Railway Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury's special gift to Calcutta: the circular railway. About 195 families had already been evicted from along the rail tracks on the Hastings-Baghbazar stretch corresponding to the circular railway's first phase which became operational early this year.

But the squatters are far from resigned to their fate. Less than a week before the eviction notice was served, leaders of the 30,000 squatters inhabiting the railway land, alongwith hutment dwellers from other city areas, formed an organisation called Chinnamul Sramjibi Adhikar Samiti to fight against the evictions and demand better living space. Says the samiti president, Gopal Mondol: "The samiti will not allow any eviction without proper rehabilitation." This mood of the city's countless slum dwellers is bound to embarrass the Left Front Government which has promised to clear the encroachers from railway land for the project. The state Government now finds itself on a sticky wicket. Says the Minister for Urban Affairs Prasanta Sur: "What can I do if the Railways don't give a farthing for rehabilitation?" Railway Minister Choudhury has made it clear that rehabilitation of encroachers was the state Government's responsibility and in any case the

> **Calcutta has to choose one of the two: allow thousands of squatters to live where they do or meet the need of lakhs of commuters.**

Railways did not have the kind of funds to help the state.

But the Government is contesting the railway minister's second contention. "We told the railway minister that we could persuade the encroachers to move out provided we were given money to pay at least a couple of thousand rupees to each family," says Sur. A voluntary organisation, Unnayan, has estimated that rehabilitating all the affected squatters will entail an expenditure of about Rs 3.14 crore which is about 3 per cent of the Rs 104 crore to be spent on the project. "And the state Government isn't even asking that much," says the organisation's spokesman. At the rate Sur suggested, the figure would probably be in the region of only Rs 1.26 crore.

But the Railways are making it a matter of principle. Explains the Chief Engineer of Eastern Railways, S.L. Agarwal: "Can anyone occupy someone else's land and demand to be rehabilitated?" Admitting that something needed to be done for the squatters on humanitarian grounds, Agarwal says the Railways are prepared to provide its surplus land but again reverts to the question of funds. If the state Government is ready to pay for rehabilitation, the Railways can under Sections 1035-39 of the Indian Railways' 'Code for the Engineering Department' hand over surplus land. With both the Railways and the Government trying to pass the buck, it appears likely that the squatters' struggle for proper rehabilitation is going to be a long-drawn affair.

To begin with, the squatters' samiti has planned to hold a massive rally on October 20 in an attempt to pressurise the Government to immediately take up the rehabilitation work. Mondol points out that the evictions being carried out by the Urban Affairs Department are patently discriminatory: 15 corporation sweepers evicted from the Baghbazar station area have been resettled while 10 other families were left on the streets to fend for themselves. Worse, about 85 families were evicted

from the Ananda Neogi Lane to create space to resettle the sweepers.

THIS absurd incident represents the genuine problem facing the Government. The circular railway is one of many developmental projects Calcutta desperately needs. Sur argues that no city in the country is as chock-full of people as Calcutta. All developmental projects like widening of roads or constructing flyovers invariably come up against resistance from squatters. "It is impossible to do anything and there is no end to rehabilitation in this city." Unauthorised squatters and hawkers refuse to move out from the heart of the city even when offered more space in the suburbs. A number of urban renewal programmes of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority have flopped for this reason. "Thanks to high court decisions, I have found it impossible to move out even the unhealthy *khatals* (cow sheds) from residential areas," laments Sur. He was referring to the ambitious project under which modern cow sheds were constructed at Harighata and Ganganagar to house as many as 13,000 cows.

To its credit, the Government has rehabilitated several thousand people whose houses were demolished during the construction of the second Hooghly bridge and the Eastern Metropolitan bypass. "But there are always more people demanding rehabilitation," says Sur.

Jai Sen of Unnayan, however, feels that the Government has been acting in an undemocratic and arbitrary manner" in dealing with the squatters. Unnayan's thesis is that the unorganised sector comprising of squatters, hawkers and even rickshaw-pullers, is an integral part of the city's economy. "They can survive only by staying in the central areas of the city," says Sen explaining his organisation's determination to resist any developmental programme that adversely affects or threatens the existence of this sector.

The circular railway is thus faced with heavy odds. Even if it is finally completed, it will not be able to operate in an efficient manner as the current experience over the Tollygunge and Majerghat stretch shows: the encroachments barely allows the trains to achieve more than crawling speed. "Major portions of the railway network within the city are unfit for normal railway operations," reminds Agarwal. Clearly evidently Calcutta will now have to choose one of the two: allow the thousands of squatters to live where they do and possibly proliferate or meet the need of lakhs of commuters.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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DANCE

Disco Garba

THE NAVRATRI (nine nights) festival is a special and eagerly-awaited occasion in Gujarat. All across the state, women and teenaged girls from every household throng the streets dressed in the colourful *chania-cholis* and dance till the early hours of the morning. The celebrations are a symbolic way of praying to the Goddess Ambaji (Durga) for strength to overcome evil. The core of the celebrations is the traditional garba folk-dance. But when the Navratri festival ended last month, it was obvious that the dance form has been forever and inevitably lost to crude commercialism.

Today, the colourful hand-printed *chania-cholis* have been replaced with gaudy costumes. The participants hardly sing, for most do not know or understand the songs. Professional singers who charge heavily often cannot fight the temptation to break into popular filmi tunes. Five years ago, the Bombay Gujaratis started the 'disco garba' which sent shock waves in Gujarat. The religious songs were replaced by garish new creations set to disco music. Hundreds of garba dancers gyrated to the disco notes in numbers that have increased over the years. Says Wilson Battu who spent a busy week last fortnight fixing disco lights at various garba shows in Ahmedabad: "With flickering lights and loud disco music, most youngsters find tremendous enjoyment by just madly dancing about. The picture of the goddess which is supposed to occupy a prime place is usually relegated to the far corner during disco garbas. The religious sanctity is rapidly eroding."

One of the main reasons for the gradual deterioration of garba is the commercialisation of the dance form. A few years ago, various organisations started setting up competitions among different garba groups. Troupes started to form and the better ones began charging money in the name of professionalism. The fad has caught on and troupes charge as much as Rs 10,000 for a two-hour show. Singers also started slipping into the commercial whirlpool and now charge fancy rates for singing at garba performances. This year, singers in Baroda were charging as much as Rs 15,000 for the nine-day festival. Points out dramatist and actor Kailash Pandya: "Commercialism has spelt the death-knell of garbas. Choreographers, dress-designers, musicians with fancy instruments and special effects men have all got into the race for commercialism."



PARMANAND DALWADI



Garba the traditional way (top) and the "disco" version: commercialism

Experimentations have led choreographers to blend in a bizarre manner different dance forms into the traditional garba. Kathak and Bharat Natyam, for instance, have been attempted by some dancers. Dance sequences like Krishna Leela, Meerabai's devotion to Krishna, marriage ceremony rituals and highlights of village life have been incorporated by some troupes which give performances all over the country and even abroad. The vibrant, folksy dance has, in short, been converted into a dance drama and commercial groups are now playing to the lowest denominator of public taste. Producers of Gujarati films are particularly singled out for the abuse of garba. In their films which usually have at least one garba dance sequence, they try to outdo fellow-producers in introducing cruder and more dramatic innovations.

Ironically enough, in all of Ahmedabad, the purest garbas can be seen only in the slums of the Bharwads and Rabaris. The slum-dwellers dressed in traditional fineries dance with poetic grace to the beat of the *dholak* and typical religious songs. Their performances have no cosmetic touches and the spontaneity draws art-lovers from far and near. In contrast, the flashing lights and loud music at the posh locales in different parts of the city draw thousands of participants and many more spectators. The crowds mill about night after night enjoying the free entertainment with no thought for the fact that the once pristine dance form has breathed its last.

—RAMESH MENON

Bandit Tale

DEVI THE BANDIT QUEEN
by RICHARD SHEARS & ISOBELLE GIDLEY
George Allen & Unwin
Pages: 244; Price: £8.95



AFTER years of wild speculation, when the public finally came face to face with Phoolan Devi at her surrender in Bhind in February 1983, her story it was realised, was so hard to ascertain for accuracy and authentic detail that what was known could be written on the back of a postage stamp. Actually, reams of newsprint were then expended and, so far as the media was concerned, it turned out that the Phoolan Devi saga was merely 30 yards of bad road. Her myth died the death of a typical media monster because the bottom of the barrel had been scraped to sustain reader interest. Moreover, her character presented definite problems: coarse to talk to and common to look at, in turns hysterical and pathetic, she was neither the stuff of soft-core romance nor hardcore feminist fiction. Sadly, she wasn't a type; the labels of Bandit Queen and Queen of the Badlands required too much tailoring to fit; to write the truth about Phoolan Devi was to start with the impenetrable premise that there is no final truth, only versions and interpretations, and her own riddled with inescapable loopholes.

Were that the effort of the authors of this split-second five-finger exercise on electronic typewriters, something could be said about it. But this couple are so flashy about the skills of their hand job, half the fun lies in reading the three paragraphs about them on the dust jacket. Shears is a veteran of Fleet Street tabloids, the artistry of his pneumatic finger muscles only matched by his elasticised globe-trotting. Known as "the fastest pen in the West", he manages almost simultaneously it seems, to obtain exclusive interviews with I.R.A. gunmen and New Guinea tribesmen; his "nemesis" Isobelle Gidley, the great granddaughter of a cannibal chief, he met while covering the Coconut War whatever that was. "Fortunately Isobelle had been a practising vegetarian for years and had learned to control her ancestral urges. Since leaving Paradise, Isobelle has been a barrister, a singer, an actress, a producer, a poet and an insatiable (sic) adventurer." It's as indomitable a combination as the old condom and jelly. And the quickies they produce—10 books in three years—are as disposable as overnight sheaths.

Poor Phoolan. Impoverished at birth, married at age 11, beaten and abused by cousin and husband and father, sexually assaulted in jail, separated from her dacoit lover, then gang-raped before going on gory rampage—after all that she now has the Shears & Gidley double bore shoved in her gut. She's met her nemesis in print for the first time, and the resulting toss-up is like a lethal Molotov cocktail. They spell *matkas* as *mataks*—fast writers after all—and have delectable bits of dialogue. ("That's rid of you. Never return to Gorhapurwa, you ugly bitch"; "Oh my God, it's



Phoolan Devi: media myth

Phoolan Devi. There is going to be terrible trouble." "Phoolan Devi, are you going to stay as the paramour of Vikram Mallah for ever?") issuing from the characters' mouths like comic strip balloons.

Sometimes the action gets hot. "The bandit girl put the megaphone to her lips. 'You motherfuckers! Bring the dogs out!...Bring them, or I'll shove my shotgun up you asses and blast your stupid heads off!" No one can accuse Shears & Gidley of not having steeped themselves in India via the India Office Library in London or the best-known guide in Gwalior. Plus, of course, a few police contacts who trumped up as the "intermediary" they used to speak to Phoolan herself.

Having fed the morass of information, impressions, dialogue and local colour through their mechanised minds, they've produced a finely-finished pulp that is irresistible. If pot-boilers be the food of empty evenings, read on.

—SUNIL SETHI

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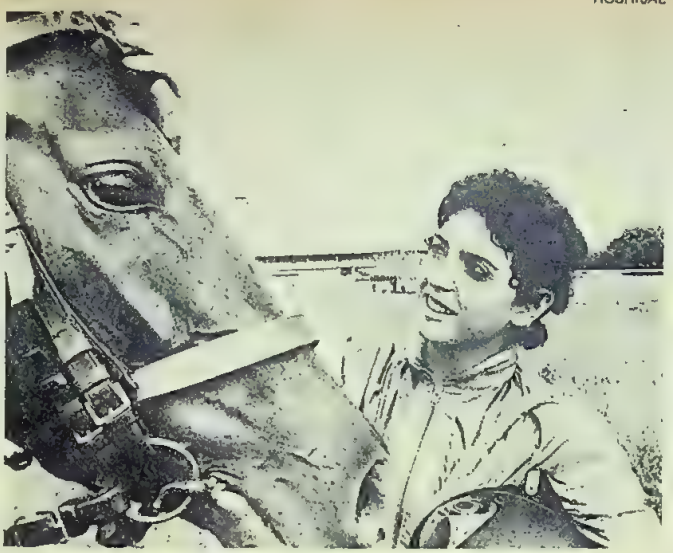
◆ If ever there was a hassled man, it's **Rajesh Khanna**. Over the last decade, income tax raiders have refused to let the waning star alone. They thunder into his house, overturn his mattress, peep into the attic and claim to recover lakhs of rupees. Except, says the harassed hero, only a few thousand of those rupees are his. The rest belongs to his associates and just happens to be lying around. "Every time the income tax authorities recruit a new crop of trainees," he growled, "they send them to my house for training." Well, Khanna still has one thing the taxman cannot touch: his sense of humour.



Khanna: taxman cometh

◆ Thousands of people fall over each other every year to get to see the Bharatiya Kala Kendra Ramlila. But the drama behind the scenes this Dussehra was far more interesting: **Sita** decamped with father-in-law **Dasratha**, arch enemy **Ravana** and all his nefarious demons claiming there was no *Ram-rajya* anymore and so they would not perform. After a quarter century of work, Dasratha was getting one-third the salary of **Ram**. "What's unusual about that," said Bhushan Lakandari who plays Ram, "the son does often overtake the father." While the *yuddha* with the management—which maintains it is a non-profit institution—may or may not get the artistes their rights, K. Shekharan, who plays Ravana said, amused: "It has given us more publicity than we've ever got for our performances."

HOSHI JAL



Jockey Ayesha Captain: horse proud

CHHAYA KENDRA



Hillary: coming over

◆ The climber of mountains, **Edmund Hillary** is coming to stay. When the New Zealand High Commission opens its doors this December, our Everest hero will step out as high commissioner. "I have a considerable enthusiasm for the people of India and Nepal," Hillary said. India is just as enthusiastic. Said Captain M.S. Kohli who led the Indian Everest expedition in 1965: "Hillary is a wonderful human being."



Nazareth: going places

◆ Barely had the euphoria over Zubin Mehta subsided when it was time for Bombay to hold its breath again—for here was another musical son-of-the-soil, **Daniel Nazareth**. Conducter of the famous Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Nazareth wielded his baton over Rossini's *Barber of Seville* to show his country just what Italian opera was all about. Like Zubin, he is a Bombay boy. "This is my home," he said, "but we are very different types of people with very different types of approaches to music making." Yes, but who's complaining?

◆ Such a fragile looking thing, but **Ayesha Captain** has taken 30 falls off her horse—and bounced right back into the saddle. Well, not so surprising really—Ayesha's father, mother and grandmother are all riders and this season, the spirited youngster became India's first woman jockey. It was a tough decision for the authorities of the Royal Western India Turf Club, though—they had to first partition the jockeys' room to create a separate women's section.

◆ Another Hindi film about a poor old journalist fighting injustice and the black forces of the underworld. So what's new? What is new is that *Jaago's* author, director, hero is **Jambuwantrao Dhote**, rebel Congress(I) MP, lion of Vidarbha and son-in-law of Ramrao Adik. In other words, a man who should know what he's talking about. When asked what it felt to be a hero, Dhote was hardly modest: "I have been acting the part of hero all my life, as a student leader, sportsman or in politics."



Dhote in *Jaago*

Kala Kendra artists: a new twist



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An Uncertain Future

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran's sudden illness led to a massive emotional upsurge in the state, but also threw its politics into turmoil. The medical drama was matched by the political manoeuvring behind the scenes.

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The Indian Caper

In a sensational affidavit filed in a US court, a man claiming to be a CIA agent, alleged that the agency was planning to do business with India through an Indian businessman, S.S. Pasrich, supposedly close to Rajiv Gandhi. The charges have been denied by Pasrich.

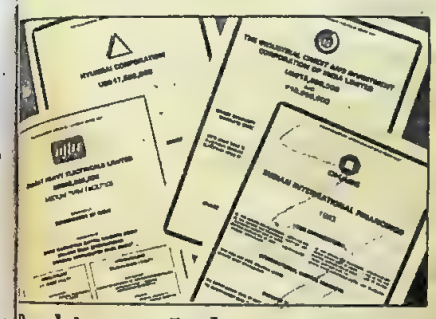
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The Critical State

The second in a series of state-oriented election specials concentrates on the Congress(I)-ruled state of Maharashtra. The special report analyses the pre-poll mood in the state and gauges the possible direction of the electoral wind.

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Banking on India

An increasing number of foreign banks are making a beeline to invest in India, which they realise has a good track record in debt servicing, a relatively stable political system and economy. A special report on this unexpected boom.

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The Conflicts Within

Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud retires next July after eight long years in office. Has his tenure restored some of the Supreme Court's lost credibility? What is the present state of affairs? A look at likely candidates for chief justiceship.

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A Dangerous Dependency

For thousands of villagers in parts of western Rajasthan, opium consumption has become a daily ritual that threatens to permanently cripple their lives. But, there's hope yet, in the form of de-addiction camps set up by a good samaritan.

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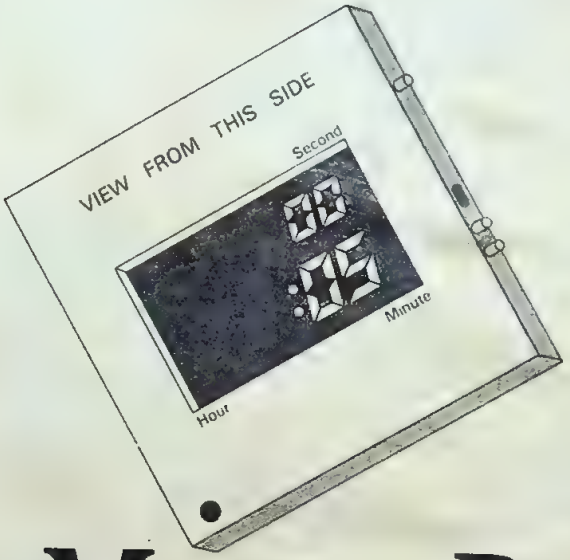
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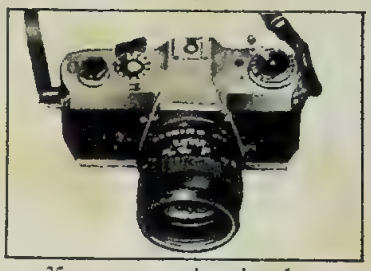
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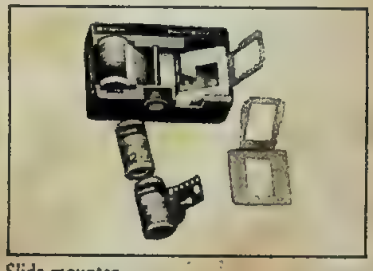
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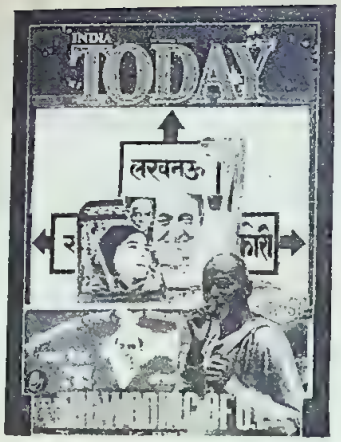
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LETTERS



INFLATED IMPORTANCE

Just because Uttar Pradesh has the biggest number of seats in the Lok Sabha ("Wooing the Electorate", October 31) it is wrong to give so much weightage to that state alone. True, Uttar Pradesh used to be politically crucial for the balance of power but now the scene has shifted to the south, particularly to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Bangalore — RAMANAND SHARMA

■ Political expediency and ritualistic rhythms characterise the election campaigns of all the political parties. There is no one, it seems, who will attempt to cement the cracks in communal harmony, so that the diverse castes and sects of Uttar Pradesh form one image to incorporate all that secularism stands for. Wooing the electorate and winning the votes should be less essential than making a solid beginning towards an integrated India—starting with Uttar Pradesh.

Meerut — R.R. LALL

A DEFINITE BIAS

It was very dejecting to note the anti-Hindu bias in your magazine. Your special feature "Barriers of Bigotry" (October 31) presents Hindus as villains without a word for the fanatic mullahs. Only instances of Hindu girls being harassed by their parents are given. What a Muslim would do to his daughter for marrying a Hindu is anyone's guess.

Bangalore — SANJAY RAINA

■ Your article shows that India stands on a very weak and delicate foundation of secularism. By constitution India is secular, but Indians are basically cocooned in their respective religions. The socio-religious organisations today, instead of working for harmony among the different religions are in fact doing the opposite. Organisations like the VHP should fight against evils like dowry and the caste system instead of using their resources to prevent marriages between people who have broken away from prejudices of caste and community.

Sonepat — RAVI SANDHU

■ I thought the feature on inter-religious marriages would give a balanced view of the problem, but it only condemns the Hindus and totally omits the Muslims who, in such matters, are far more bigoted. Condemn bigotry by all means but condemn it everywhere.

New Delhi — MANGAT RAM

■ Thank you for your special feature on inter-religious marriages. It is shocking and distressing to hear of such stories of harassment in this day and age. Can't these religious groups let people live their own lives! It makes me wonder whether it is people that make society or society which makes the individual. Is it a fault of our educational policy? Why are such organisations like the National Integration Society and various Mahila sansthans silent? Or are they also made of narrow-minded people?

Delhi — ANIL RAI

DIFFICULT TASK

Arun Shourie's column "Occasion for Change" (October 31) not only shows a new dimension of the Opposition's unity but also appropriately stresses the need for higher values. But the real obstacle to opposition unity is the politician's ego. The attitude of the voters towards the corrupt politicians and honest social workers makes the task even more difficult.

Bhubaneswar — MANINDRA NAYAK

AN UNHOLY MIX

I agree with the chief minister of Kerala that the administration of temples should be entrusted to those who believe and have faith in God ("Holy Smoke", October 31). Of course, they should be practitioners of the faith as in the case of churches and mosques. I feel religion should not be mixed with politics and the Government should never interfere. Hinduism does preach tolerance and that is how other religions have flourished in India.

Trivandrum — R.V. VENKATRAMAN

INGLORIOUS TENURE

"Bhaskara's Benevolence" (October 31) exposed the misdeeds and high-

handedness of the 31-day-old Bhaskara Rao ministry. During his inglorious tenure as chief minister, he usurped the chief ministership and incurred a heavy drain on the state exchequer. He may have succeeded in gladdening the hearts of a few individuals but has certainly earned the wrath of the masses.

Bangalore — N.J. RAVI CHANDER

WRONG PRIORITIES

It is really unfortunate that leprosy patients being looked after by Dr Patwardhan ("A Serious Setback," October 31) should have been treated so shabbily. If the state has to divide its finances according to priorities, leprosy must receive the most attention. But as usual other petty considerations have played their part. If the state Government was not willing to give financial assistance the Centre ought to have stepped in. But it appears that propaganda through loan melas and inauguration of TV transmitters is more important.

Bangalore — A. BRITO

NOTORIOUS DEFECTOR

Indira is a liar all right but Charan Singh should be the last person to discuss anybody else's integrity (Interview of the Fortnight, October 15).

New Delhi — DR A.N. BHANDARKAR

■ Despite all the goodwill in the world, one cannot help but be repelled by the man's character. Charan Singh himself is the worst offender, he has greater notoriety than anyone else for side-switching and he goes on to say that 'Indira is a liar'. It is her father who started encouraging the divisive forces, and now she is doing the same thing. I am not a great admirer of Indira Gandhi but one does not require a lot of imagination to appreciate what could have happened if the alternative to Indira Gandhi and the Congress(I) was not there when Charan Singh fell from his brief stint as prime minister.

Charan Singh favours the presidential system on the lines of the one in the US. He goes on to say that the President cannot be served with a no-confidence motion unless there are charges of treason or corruption and this system will eliminate horse-trading in MLA's and MP's. Visualising himself as President, why should Charan Singh need to bother about horse-trading at all in spite of his being a master of the game himself? Unfortunately he is 82 but nevertheless a presidency for life for him would dispense with wasteful electioneering. Alas, we all have to die one day and at 82 one would think of it a little more often perhaps.

Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman — FRED VAS

■ Your interview of the fortnight was disappointing and biased. The introduction was much longer than the actual interview. If your correspondent wished to render the negative side of the interviewee then he should have brought out that facet of Charan Singh's personality so as to substantiate his prejudices.

Agra — VIPIN KUMAR

FATAL HABITS

Referring to the article "Cancer: The Growing Threat", (October 15), it was fascinating to know that India has unfortunately both the largest number of cancer patients and the smallest number of radiotherapy machines. Insight reveals that it is not the insufficiency of radiotherapy machines but our own habits of chewing paan and tobacco, smoking beedis and other similar things which impel us into the gaping mouth of the murderous monster.

Simla — ANITA CHAUHAN

■ Your report on cancer helped eradicate a lot of misconceptions about the disease. In the latter part of the article it is mentioned that there is an immediate need to install radiation therapy centres and the total cost is estimated to be around Rs 108 crore. We also need many more radiotherapists and physicians. This is a requirement that seems almost impossible to fulfil so we should think of an alternative to stop the disease from taking so many lives. An intensive research programme on certain medicinal plants which show curbing effects on cancer should be organised by the Government.

Bombay — SHIRISH R. SAWANT

OVERDRAWN PICTURE

It was a pleasure to read the story on the National Museum ("The Capital Showpiece", October 15). The picture painted, however, seems to be overdrawn. It appears that the present incumbent of the post of director may have engineered the piece as an example of 'woo the press to boost yourself'. The write-up has in one stroke denigrated the contributions of the previous directors. To suggest that before Sihare's magic touch, the museum was a dungeon is an insult to the art-lovers of Delhi who have long been admirers of the institution.

New Delhi — PHYLLIS ROTH

DOG IN THE MANGER

It is now established without doubt that the NFDC's attitude towards the import of foreign films ("Hollywood or Bust", October 15) is that of a dog in the manger. The NFDC, like any other government agency, reaps the harvest while it can and knowing the popularity foreign films enjoy in this country, it does not want to miss out in making that extra buck. Most of its imported films just about break even at the box-office while the more successful ones are those marketed by the MPEAA. If at all the agreement between the Government and the MPEAA gets finalised the former should know that the import content be increased and, in order to get better quality films, its outdated censorship guidelines be revamped. With all the trash available in the video market it will be the Government who will stand to lose if the agreement fails to get underway or is delayed.

Siliguri — NELSON A. PETRIE

WISHFUL THINKING

Your assessment of the Indian cricket team chosen to tour Pakistan seems to be an outcome of mere wishful thinking ("A Season of Hope", October 15). The team's composition may be regarded as 'balanced' but it is definitely not strong enough to beat Pakistan. Although our batting line-up possesses potential, it has rarely paced an innings successfully. Similarly our 'well-staffed' bowling department does not have the sting to kill. And to make it worse, the fielders have shown reluctance to accept the catches that come their way. If this remains the state of Indian cricket, fresh humiliations await our players in Pakistan and in Australia later this season.

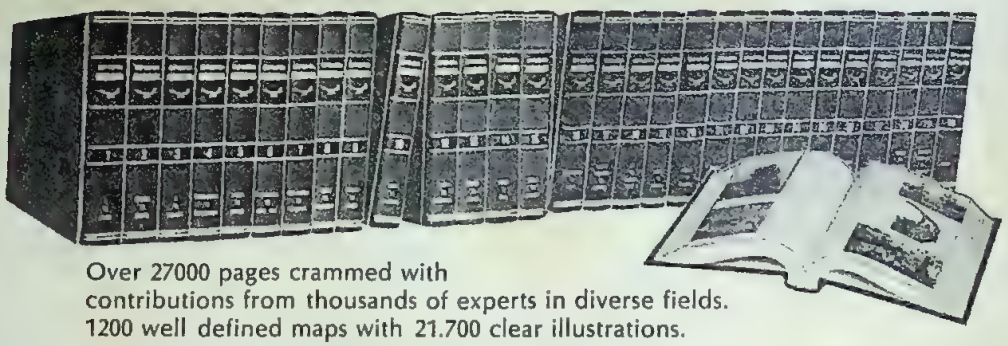
Patna — NALIN CHANDRA

WRONG DEVELOPMENT

I have not made any application for the manufacture of LAB ("Going Places", September 30). In my opinion no new LAB plants are called for under Indian conditions, but only plants for making alpha olefin sulphonates from the inedible portion of rice bran oil and acid oils. This scheme, by stopping the wastage of laundry and toilet soap in hard water, will effect a minimum net annually recurring national saving of Rs 400 crore. Linear alkylbenzene sulphonate cannot effect this saving for the simple reason that it is incompatible with soap. Wrong industrial development is one important reason for perpetuating poverty in Mother India.

Bombay — DR B.P. GODREJ

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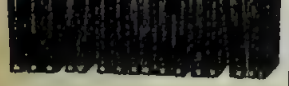
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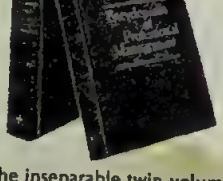
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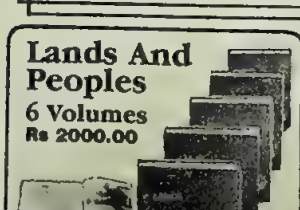
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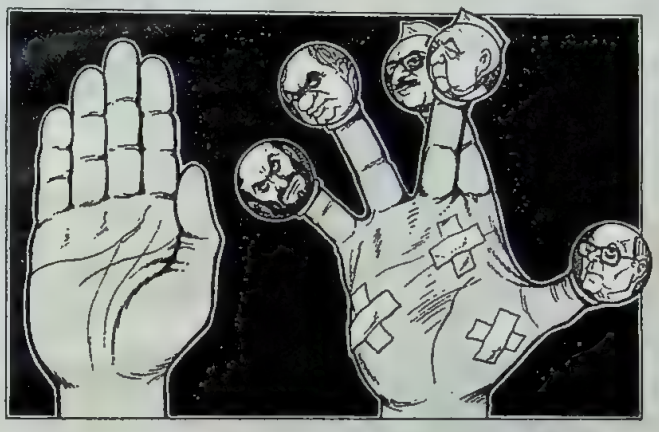
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The Opposition Option

IT IS time the opposition parties started taking themselves seriously. If they don't, no one else will, certainly not the electorate which must judge between them and the Congress(I) within the next ten weeks, if the election is held according to plans. The now-on, now-off merger charade has gone on long enough, and the longer it lasts the lower falls the credibility of the Opposition, and the more cynical becomes the voting public. Indeed, if the leaders of the Opposition are unable to come to terms with one another, the electorate may well come to the conclusion that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was right when she described them as "so many prime ministers in waiting".



Consider the facts as they have emerged over the months. The opposition conclaves which started more than a year ago at Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. T. Rama Rao's initiative at Vijayawada were a solid step forward, but faltered on the rock of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The United Front on one side of the political spectrum and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on the other, were similarly positive developments, welcomed by well-wishers of these parties. Now they too have faltered, the United Front through the split in the Janata Party and its lack of real grass-roots support and organisation, and the NDA because of the dissolution of the Lok Dal and its replacement by the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party comprising the former Lok Dal, H. N. Bahuguna's Democratic Socialist Party and Ratubhai Adani's Rashtriya Congress. It was a typical case of crossed wires when the BJP's Atal Behari Vajpayee announced in Jammu that the NDA had ceased to exist and was contradicted a short while later by Lok Dal leader Charan Singh who asked at a press conference: "How can the NDA break unless I break it?" What lies at the back of the mind of Choudhary Charan Singh, the main architect of these moves, is anybody's guess, but the BJP could hardly be expected to remain in the same grouping as its socialist critics such as Bahuguna.

This is precisely the point. It was pretty clear through the long series of opposition conclaves from Vijayawada through Delhi, Srinagar, and Calcutta that it would be futile to try and set up just one opposition party. The reasons are simple: as the Janata experiment confirmed, the opposition spectrum is too wide to allow parties as diverse as the Marxists and the BJP to operate on the same platform, and there are too many contenders for leadership to allow this issue to be sorted out in advance. The Opposition was, in fact, moving in the right direction of seeking not a single party but a meaningful cooperation in the distribution of seats before this latest bout of merger fever suddenly seized it.

The choice before the parties couldn't be clearer. They are either going to have to cooperate with one another and tolerate one another's shortcomings or fall fragmented by the wayside fighting one another. And they will avoid the latter fate only if they recognise two facts. One is that with patience and understanding, it is possible to create room enough for everyone to share in the spoils. Second, this patience and understanding will remain elusive if any one individual attempts to stake a claim to absolute leadership beforehand.

A look at the political map of the country makes this clear to anyone who wishes to see it. Whatever the strength of the Congress(I), it is by now clear that the opposition parties have very localised bases and areas of influence, barring one or two who spill over into more than one state. Any political front of the opposition parties must therefore necessarily start on the premise that it is a coalition among equals.

No other strategy can succeed. Otherwise there is no reason for regional strongmen to actively associate themselves with efforts to achieve an electoral unity. The only way in which such a unity will be achieved is if the Opposition calculatedly fights the election with the aim of bringing to power men who can deliver substantial chunks of parliamentary seats to the Opposition ranks, and can form a powerful grouping of leaders from among whom a prime minister can be elected. Such a grouping will have to include all the regional leaders: Farooq Abdullah from Jammu & Kashmir, Sharad Pawar from Maharashtra, N.T. Rama Rao from Andhra Pradesh, Ramakrishna Hegde from Karnataka and M. Karunanidhi from Tamil Nadu. It will, naturally, give due weight to the opinion of Charan Singh who commands support across a wide belt of the Gangetic plains as well as of the BJP with its strength in the towns and cities of the Hindi-speaking states. Chandra Shekhar's Janata Party will have to be counted in if it emerges strongly enough. And, it will have to try and make adjustments with the Marxists in West Bengal and Kerala.

With such an aim, the Opposition has more than a fighting chance in the next election. Apart from the fact that the Congress Party has almost invariably forged its way to victory on the shoulders of a divided opposition vote, there is this time round, no evidence of any powerful wave for or against the Congress (I). As usual, the ruling party is beset with squabbles and factional fights which may eat into its election organisation. But at the moment the opposition parties aren't doing any better, and if they don't change their tune, it may be Mrs Gandhi and not the Opposition who will be laughing all the way to Rashtrapati Bhavan for the swearing-in ceremony.

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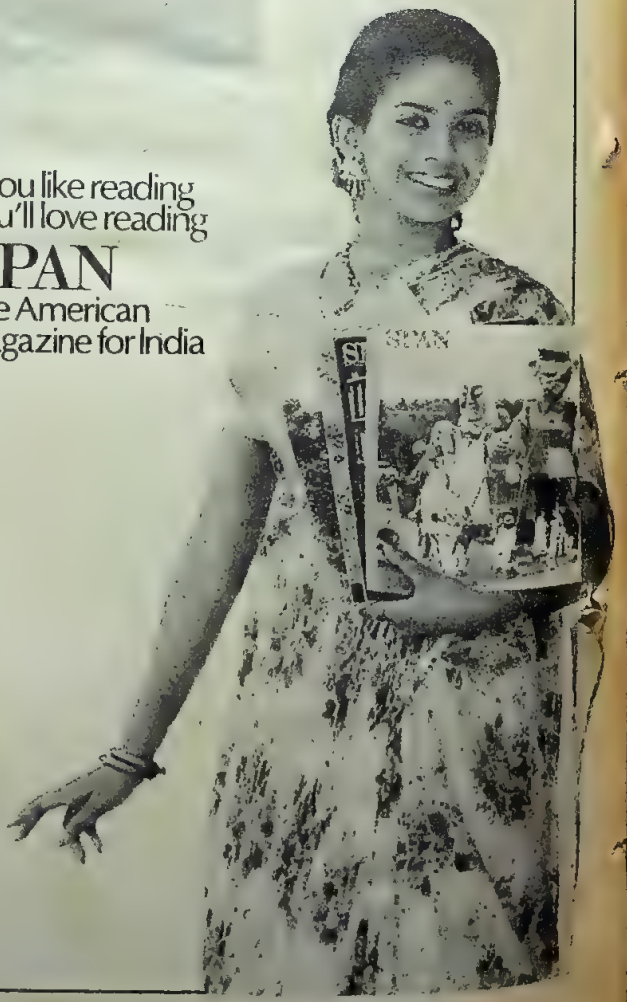
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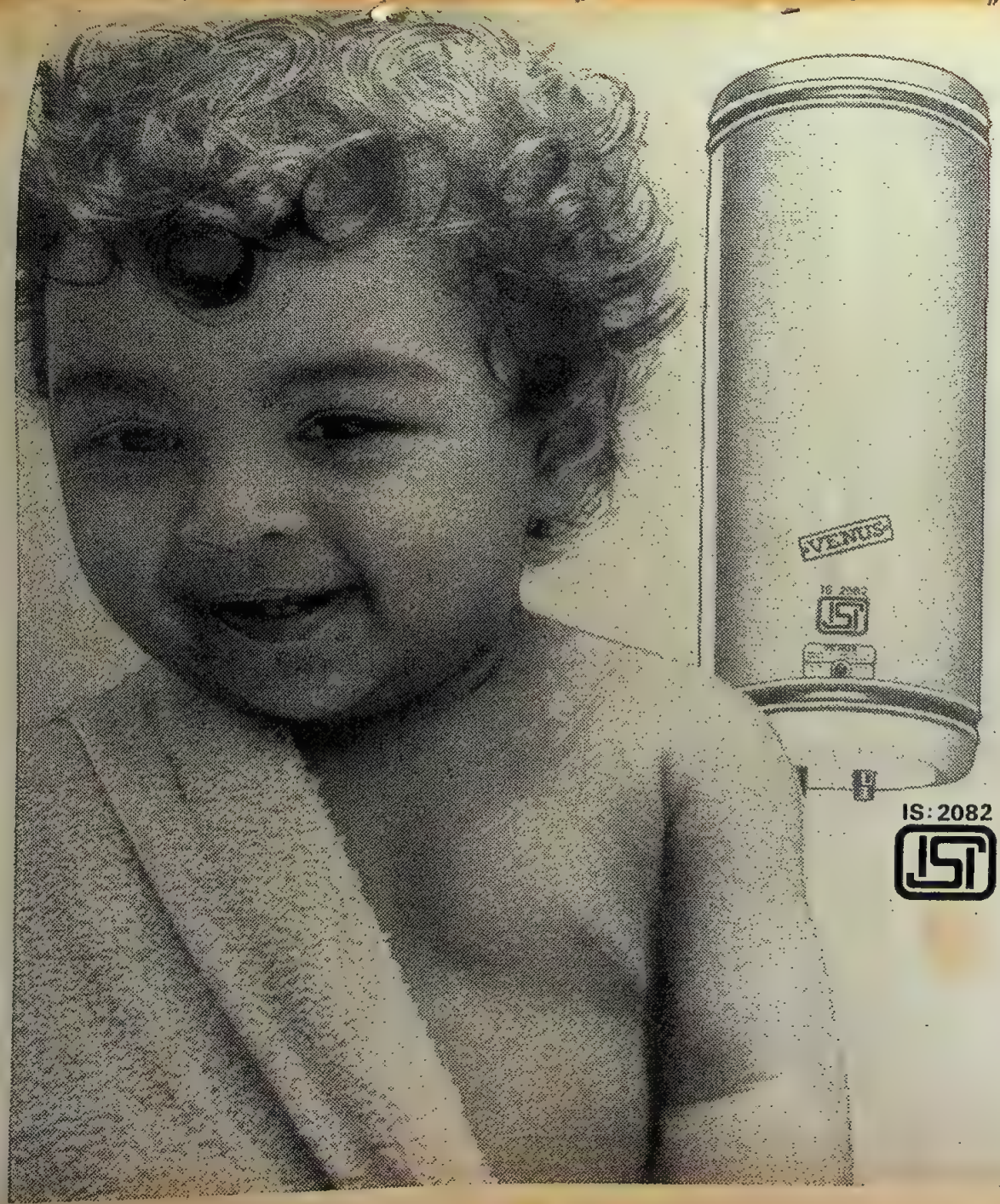
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Statesman



● *Sri Lanka would have had to build a Berlin-type wall if the island shared a common boundary with India. We are lucky the two countries are separated by sea.*

■ LALITH ATHULATHMUDALI at a function in Sri Lanka

● *It has become more an example of the army that works and not the Government that works.... The conditions in the country today are reminiscent of the later Mughal period, complete with courtier culture at the capital.*

■ LT-GENERAL S.K. SINHA (Retd) at a meeting in Pune

● *He (N.T. Rama Rao) is a political pygmy. No right thinking person will accept that man as a national leader. He doesn't know how many districts there are in the country. He is not even aware of the borders of India.*

■ N. BHASKARA RAO in *Probe India*

● *Pilate was not being sardonic when he asked what truth was, and Mrs Gandhi does not ask what truth is, so long as it is what she, against all evidence, believes.*

■ DOM MORAES quoted in *Debonair*

● *The problem that faces the country today is that the protectors of law and order have become disrupters. The police and politicians have tended to be on the same side....*

■ KULDIP NAYAR in *Current*

● *Boredom hangs like smog over Chandigarh's skies; it takes a heavier toll of life than venereal disease.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *The Hindustan Times*

● *The people of Calcutta are a law unto themselves. They are a special breed like the merino sheep, who have overcome their surroundings and probed into their inner depths.*

■ AMIT BHOWMIK in *The Sunday Observer*

● *Karnataka has become the laboratory where the test-tube baby of opposition unity is being developed.*

■ A senior Karnataka Janata leader quoted in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*

● *The only truly liberated woman in this film industry is Hema Malini. She depends on no man for anything, neither for emotional nor financial security.*

■ MAHESH BHATT in *Eve's Weekly*

● *There's a saying in the film industry that if the women cry, the producer laughs. For every tear shed, there's one more ticket sold at the box-office.*

■ PRAVIN BHATT in *The Times of India*

● *I'm supposed to be this great beauty and to be sexy and seductive, but I don't have passes made at me.*

■ MOON MOON SEN in *Filmfare*

● *I'm not a communist. Impossible. It's so difficult to be one.*

■ GOUTAM GHOSE, film-maker, in the *Telegraph*



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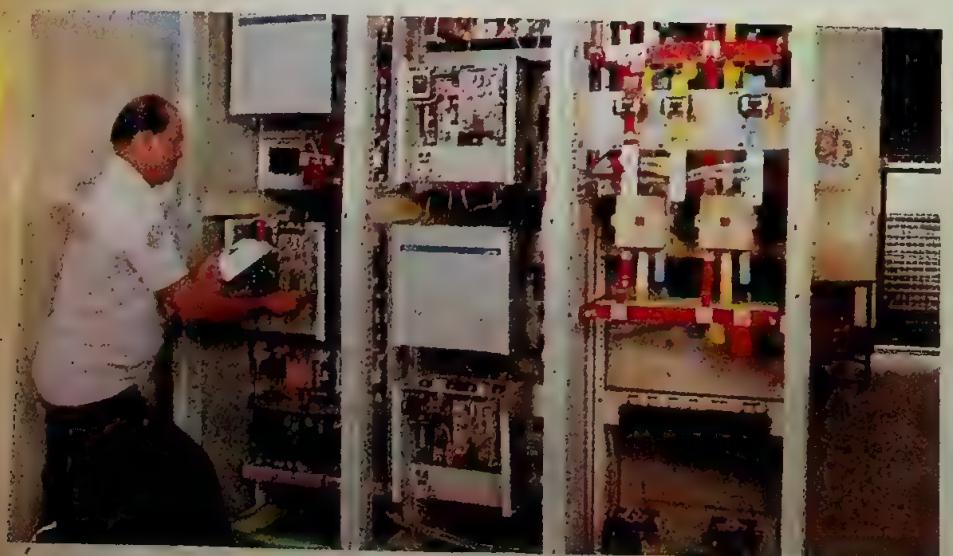
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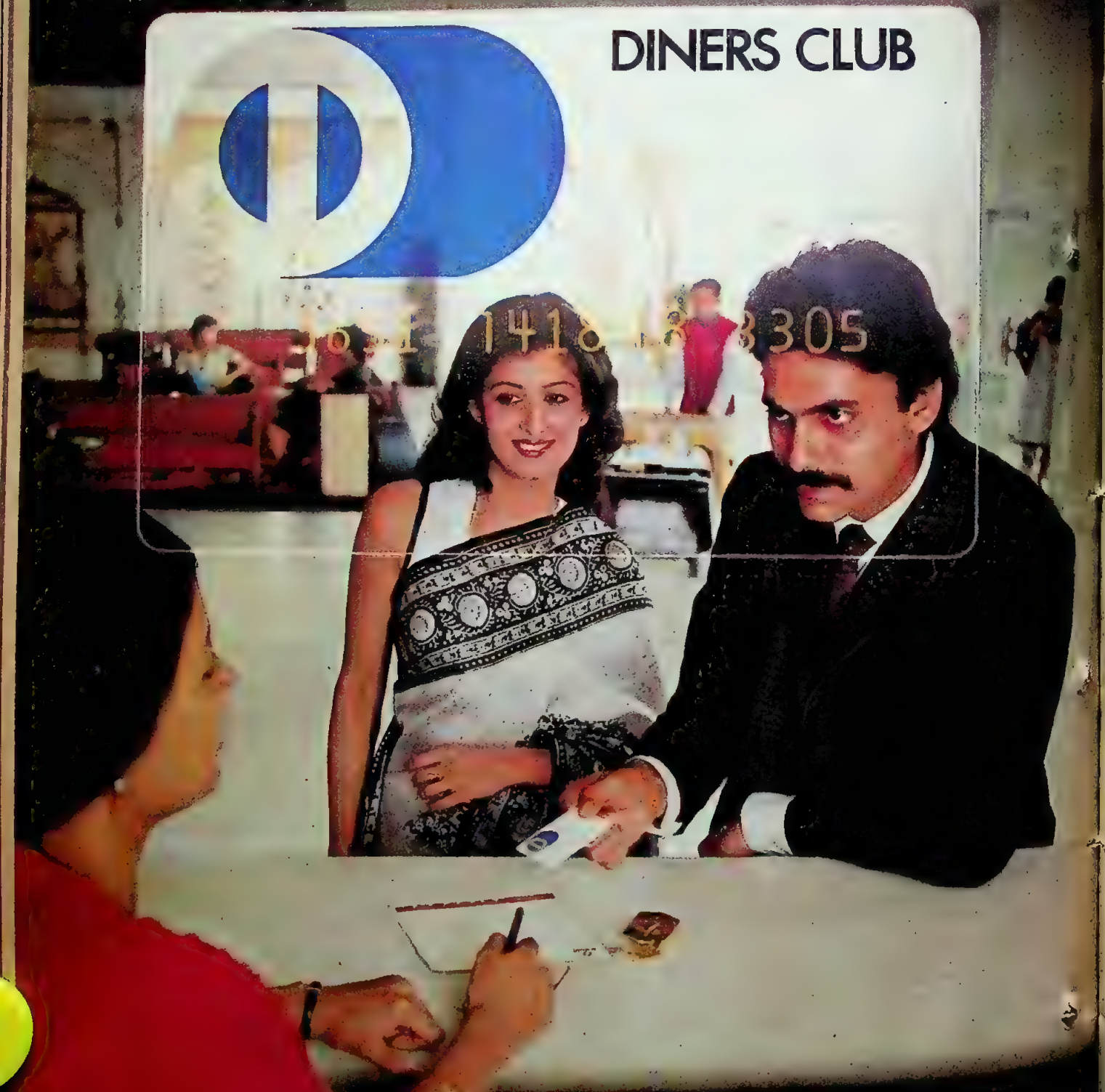
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FIELD DAY



■ Cricket, lovely cricket, is here again. Bombay goes cricket crazy at the beginning of the season. At the sprawling Shivaji Park, there are sometimes as many as a dozen matches, official and unofficial, going on at the same time. This can be a bit confusing, especially as some of the fields are the size of basketball courts. Last fortnight, two such matches were in progress next to each other. The scorers were sitting in the shade, guzzling cold drinks and ticking off the runs as they came. At the end they began putting the finishing touches to their scores.

It was at this point that one of the captains who was supposed to sign the score-sheet said that he would not sign because the scores on the sheet were all wrong. He claimed to have scored considerably more runs than the handful that the scorers gave him and part of his protest was to pick up the nearest bat and go for everybody in sight. The scorers sat down to work out what went wrong. It was easy: assuming that the two matches were played between teams A and B and C and D, the scorers appeared to have scored for matches between teams A and D and B and C. It is no wonder they call cricket a game of glorious uncertainties.

HOLY BANKS

■ Another story about Rama comes from the very place it could be expected to come from: Varanasi, the holy town. For a place where every stone, it is said, has God's name written on it, it is not surprising that it should also have a place that combines crass materialism and lofty spiritualism in its effort to get closer to God.

This is the Ram Nam Pati Bank near the Vishwanath Temple. It was established by Mahant Channu Lal over half a century ago. The unusual thing about the bank is that it does not accept money as deposits, only slips of paper with 'Ram' written on them which are then deposited in the name of the believer. That is not all: if anybody wants to draw Ram nam from the bank, they are free to do so. The present Mahant, Kailash Prasad—he is a practising lawyer—says that any kind of donation is prohibited. The bank is quite famous and the in thing is reportedly to deposit as many names as possible, presumably to prove one's devotion to God. The bank has names in various languages and is going for a deposit drive which, given the state of the world, is just as well.



WRONG TARGET

■ The Ramlila season in India invariably turns up trumps with stories of Ravana bashing up Rama in a gory rewrite of the original or of the two staggering along the stage singing to the beat of hard 'likker' sloshing inside them. Last month's Dussehra celebrations produced yet another encounter.

A Ramlila was on at Dadar. Things had got to the big fight and Rama was doing his best to skewer an agile Ravana who was showing no signs of giving up as he was supposed to do. Finally, Rama braced for a last lunge with his sword, missed and fell flat on his face. Nothing daunted, he got up, fitted bow to arrow and let fly.



The arrow hit, not Ravana, but Sita who had been cowering in a corner but now chose to shield Ravana. This was certainly not in the script, and as the audience gasped with horror Sita clung to Ravana and dared Rama to do his best. By and by the cause of Sita's most un-Sita-like behaviour came to light: Ravana and Sita had been in love for a long time and Sita could no longer bear to see her love lose. The conflict was finally resolved when a substitute Ravana was found who hastily donned his colours and died in the original's place.

TWICE SHY

■ Few people in Nagpur are going to forget the days the National Students Union of India (NSUI) came visiting. For several days the town shuddered to the sound of breaking chairs and overturned pots and pans as the students or whatever they were did their bit for national unity and integration. The ordeal weighs heavily on the minds of the sufferers, as was proved last fortnight.

A young man had gone to a shop where he bought supplies and asked for about Rs 2,000 worth of provisions. He, then said casually that he did not have the cash and would pay the delivery boy once the stuff was delivered home. This is an accepted practice. As he started to leave he was swung around by a powerful hand and deafened by a powerful voice which warned him to pay up quick or else. The reason for this personalised treatment was that the shopkeeper had had to suffer the attentions of a horde of NSUI fellows who had come into his shop, picked up a few things and walked out without paying. So, even with a relatively well-known customer he was taking no chances.



—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI


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TAMIL NADU

An Uncertain Future

IT WAS shortly after midnight, and the lobby of the year-old Apollo Hospital in central Madras was virtually deserted. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the urgent throb of motorcycle engines racing up the driveway, escorting a pilot jeep and a blue Ambassador. Tyres squealed to a halt, and out stepped the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, accompanied by his wife Janaki and personal physician, B.R. Subramaniam.

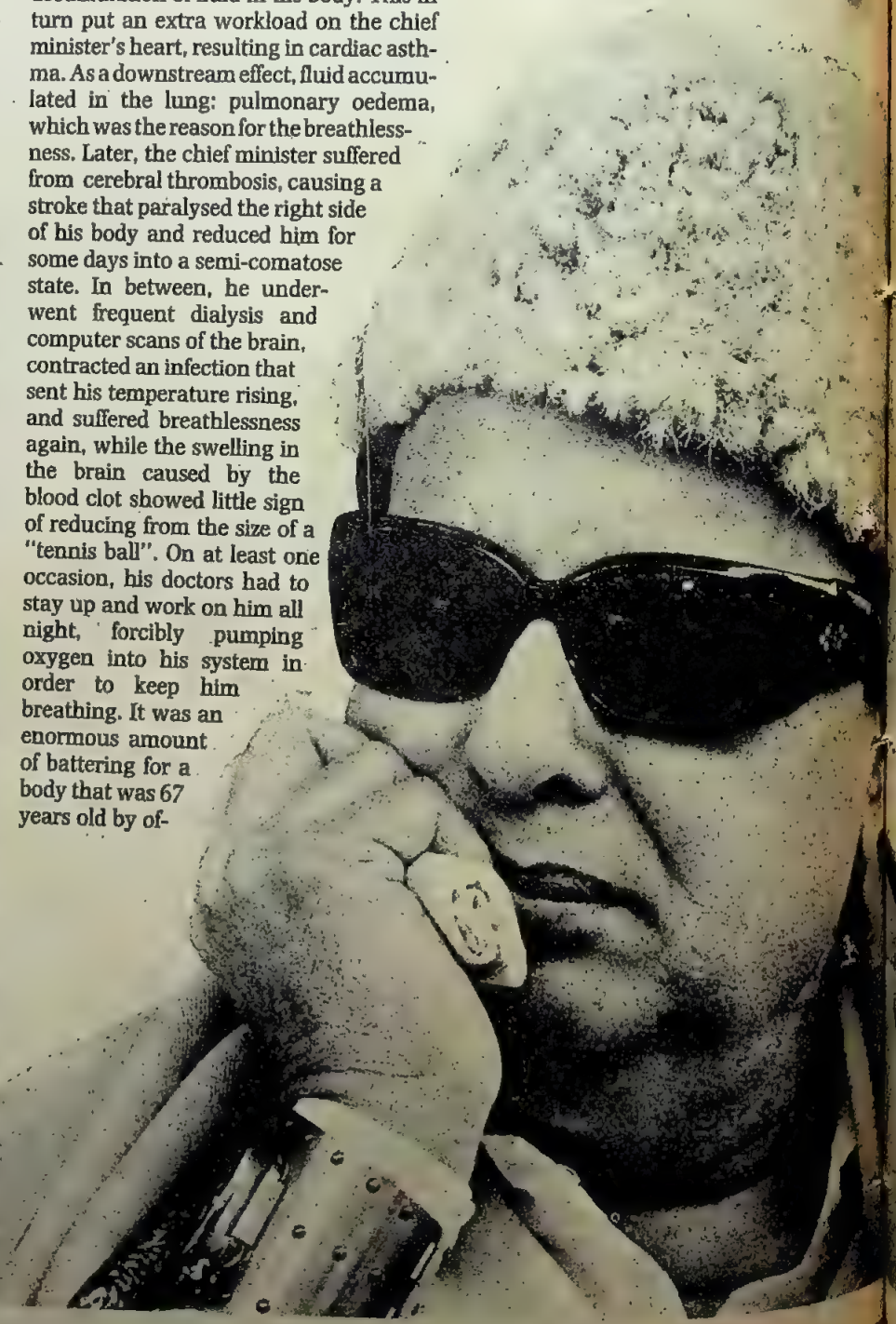
MGR was gasping desperately for breath, his chest heaving as it strained to gulp in air. But even as the hospital was galvanised into sudden frenetic activity, the chief minister was frantically repeating just one instruction in Tamil: "Don't tell anyone I am here, don't let anyone know that I have been brought to hospital." Somebody said that the sight of the chief minister's convoy of vehicles would tell its own tale, so MGR promptly ordered the vehicles to be sent away.

Apollo Hospital Chairman, Prathap C. Reddy, warned in advance about the chief minister's arrival, quickly rushed MGR to a Rs 525-a-day "super-de luxe" suite on the hospital's third floor, equipped among other things with a refrigerator and TV set. But MGR was now in no state to notice any creature comforts. He had turned blue for lack of oxygen and his doctors said later that if his admission to the hospital had been delayed by even a few minutes, his life would have been beyond saving. For the next five hours, Reddy and other doctors on the staff of the privately-managed luxury hospital struggled to get the chief minister to breathe normally again. And dawn was close at hand when MGR was able to speak at last. An obviously grateful MGR asked Reddy: "Do you do this for all your patients?"

In many ways, MGR had brought his medical crisis on his own head by refusing to heed medical advice, ignoring the danger signs that pointed to kidney failure, and indeed striving to keep his health problems a strict secret unknown to even his cabinet colleagues (*see box page 20*). Over the next two weeks, the matinee idol-turned-politician's health went through several ups and downs. He came off the critical list every few days, only for a fresh setback or complication to cause his doctors still more moments of anxiety.

A diabetic for many years, MGR's kidneys had packed up, causing an accumulation of fluid in his body. This in turn put an extra workload on the chief minister's heart, resulting in cardiac asthma. As a downstream effect, fluid accumulated in the lung: pulmonary oedema, which was the reason for the breathlessness. Later, the chief minister suffered from cerebral thrombosis, causing a stroke that paralysed the right side of his body and reduced him for some days into a semi-comatose state. In between, he underwent frequent dialysis and computer scans of the brain, contracted an infection that sent his temperature rising, and suffered breathlessness again, while the swelling in the brain caused by the blood clot showed little sign of reducing from the size of a "tennis ball". On at least one occasion, his doctors had to stay up and work on him all night, forcibly pumping oxygen into his system in order to keep him breathing. It was an enormous amount of battering for a body that was 67 years old by official reckoning (over 70, unofficially), but 16 days after the first midnight drama, the doctors finally began to look cheerful. The patient looked as if he was finally pulling through.

It was a state of affairs that had not just



M.G. Ramachandran: critical time

the doctors, but the state Government, 50 million Tamilians and yet more millions outside the state on tenterhooks. Experts were flown in from the United States and Japan to look at the patient, special planes were made to stand by on three occasions in case MGR had to be flown abroad for surgery, and the prime minister paid a quick visit. Fanatical followers of the durable matinee idol burnt themselves to death (13, according to one count) or slashed themselves with razor-blades in a frenzy of self-flagellation. Hundreds of telegrams poured in daily, with prayers, offers of kidneys, and in some cases threats of dire consequences if the doctors did not rescue their "God". One telegram told the Apollo doctors that the sender would not eat till they told him that MGR was safe. Another, from a doctor, offered his brain to the chief minister.

Crowds from a slum next to the hospital kept up a round-the-clock vigil from tree-tops overlooking the hospital entrance. The police hurriedly erected wooden barricades at the head of the hospital's approach road, 200 yards away, to keep the crowds at bay. But the hospital itself was swarming with state ministers, parliamentarians and legislators, journalists and political hangers-on. A visitors' book in the lobby had its pages quickly filled with the signatures of anxious well-wishers. Women, in sarees adorned in red, white and black, the colours of MGR's political party, the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), brought *prasad* from temples across the state. And in virtually every place of worship, the devout offered prayers and supplications for the VIP patient's speedy recovery.

It was a scale of mass idolatry never before witnessed in the country. On the roads of Madras and other towns in the districts, small processions of men, women and children trekked for up to 30 km to a favoured temple or church. Posters went up on walls and in buses, praying for MGR's recovery. Frequently, unconfirmed rumours spread like wildfire amid fears that the doctors were not revealing the whole truth. On at least two occasions, the crowds threatened to get violent as word spread that MGR was dead. And the doctor's unspoken fear was that if the patient failed to survive, the hospital would almost certainly become the focus of an enraged mob's anguished fury.



AS THE chief minister struggled for his life, the world outside was thrown into confusion and suspense. As cabinet ministers made Apollo their headquarters, the state's administration virtually ground to a halt. In the immediate aftermath of MGR's illness, AIADMK politicians were even seen weeping unashamedly in the hospital. But this was quickly followed by a discreet struggle for the succession as senior members of the state Cabinet realised that the chief minister would be out of action for some weeks, if not months. Even more important, however, the parliamentary and state assembly elections loomed ahead. Would the enormous state-wide wave of sympathy for a seriously ill hero be converted into votes for the proposed AIADMK-Congress(I) combine? Or would MGR's recovery prove too slow for him to wage a campaign effectively and to hold office, so that what is essentially a one-man party collapses like a house of cards?

With the medical picture still unclear, there were no immediate answers to these questions. But with Tamil Nadu's 39 Lok Sabha seats hanging in the balance at a time when Mrs Gandhi needed desperately to count on at least one of the southern states as being "safe", MGR's illness acquired a national, political significance that quickly made him a vital factor in the election calculus.

Sivaji Ganesan, the veteran of 250 films who is also the chairman of the Congress(I)'s campaign committee in the state, realised this quickly enough, and telephoned New Delhi three days after MGR suffered his crippling stroke. Said Sivaji: "I rang up Dhawan in Delhi and told him Madam should come. Dhawan said she would come a little later, but I said she must come immediately. And she came that day itself." Not only did Mrs Gandhi come visiting, she also said that a special plane would stand by in case MGR had to be flown abroad for surgery. These gestures to a Tamil hero won her instant goodwill in a state which has traditionally voted for personalities rather than party platforms—Kamaraj, Annadurai, Karunanidhi and MGR himself.

For close to a decade, the matinee idol-turned-politician has monopolised the floodlights as only a man who has straddled Tamil Nadu's intertwined worlds of cinema and politics can. As a hero of scores of films, many of them with a political message, his name was a household word even 20 years ago. And his well-known acts of personal charity—distributing food and clothes to the poor—had then earned him a special affection bordering on worship. If he merely sipped a glass of orange juice offered to him at a public meeting, the rest of the liquid would be diluted in buckets of water, which would then be passed around for his fans to drink as *theertham* (or holy water). Slumlords in the industrial town of Coimbatore used to pull down giant film hoardings of MGR and hire them to slum women to sleep on at night.

Last fortnight's political crisis was the direct result of the AIADMK's complete dependence on this astonishing MGR cult for its survival. To the extent that MGR was the party and vice versa, the prospect of facing an election without a politically active MGR threw the AIADMK's largely faceless second rung of leaders into a state of uncertainty and depression. Devoid of any strong political ideology, and almost hamstrung by the record of an administration generally recognised as flabby and unexciting, the party suddenly seemed in danger of losing its raison d'etre. For MGR had carried personality-oriented politics to its ultimate degree, keeping his party under control by making it almost completely dependent on him for its votes.

Almost inevitably, then, the prospect of a politically incapacitated chief minister led to immediate factional tussles within the AIADMK. And the first casualty was the one person whom MGR had seemed to be grooming as his political successor: his leading lady in over two dozen films, Jayalalitha. For close to two years, MGR had risked antagonising virtually every leader in his party by pushing Jayalalitha to the forefront, making her the party's propaganda secretary and then giving her a ticket to the Rajya Sabha. Orders were issued that cabinet ministers must stand up when she arrived to address a public function—which had the immediate result of ministers becoming reluctant to share any public platform with her. And revenue minister S.D. Somasundaram's exit from the party in September had more than a little to do with the emergence of Jayalalitha as a major political factor.

But with MGR ill and incapacitated,

the party bosses lost no time in getting their own back. When Jayalalitha visited the hospital to call on MGR, she was denied access to his suite. She was given no say in any of the consultations on his treatment. And when, in a desperate effort to stay in the limelight, she issued a statement in the name of the party saying that the doctors had called in Japanese specialists to take a look at the chief minister, the party general secretary P.U. Shanmugham denied that the statement had been issued by the party office. Shanmugham told INDIA TODAY: "I have not issued her a show cause notice for this. But that does not mean that I approve of the press release issued by the MP." And though he refrained from comment despite repeated questions about her future in the party, there was no mistaking the gleam of revenge in his eye.

THERE was some speculation as to whether MGR's 15,000 *manrams* (fan clubs) and their 18 lakh members (constituting the backbone of the party machinery) would stand by her. But a prominent leader of the grandiosely-styled All-World MGR Manrams Association put this to rest very quickly when he referred to Jayalalitha in terms that bordered on abuse, and said the fan clubs blamed her for MGR's health problems. Jayalalitha herself was not available for comment, claiming first that she had no time for a week, and later reporting sick herself. With virtually every politician of note in the state writing off her political future, her isolation seemed complete.

Meanwhile, a more crucial power struggle surfaced in the state cabinet as key ministers jockeyed into position for a succession battle. Three days after the chief minister suffered his crippling stroke, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, finance minister and the No. 2 man in the cabinet, met Governor S.L. Khurana privately at Raj Bhavan. The cabinet met two days later amid speculation that Nedunchezhiyan, a political lightweight despite his seniority and experience, had staked his claim to being appointed acting chief minister. At the cabinet meeting itself, Chief Secretary K. Chokalingam was asked to leave midway through. But the vital political discussion that followed seemed to have led to a stalemate, because the only decision of note was that Nedunchezhiyan would look after the chief minister's files for the time being. This was on the strength of Nedunchezhiyan's word that MGR had orally instructed him along these lines before he suffered his stroke. But political rivals privately questioned this on two grounds: one, the chief minister was reported to

MGR

Veil of Secrecy

AN AIR of suspense and uncertainty hung over the Apollo Hospital in central Madras for most of October. But the one certainty through a troubled period was that M.G. Ramachandran had brought his medical troubles on his own head through negligence and an irrational desire to keep his ailments a very tight secret.

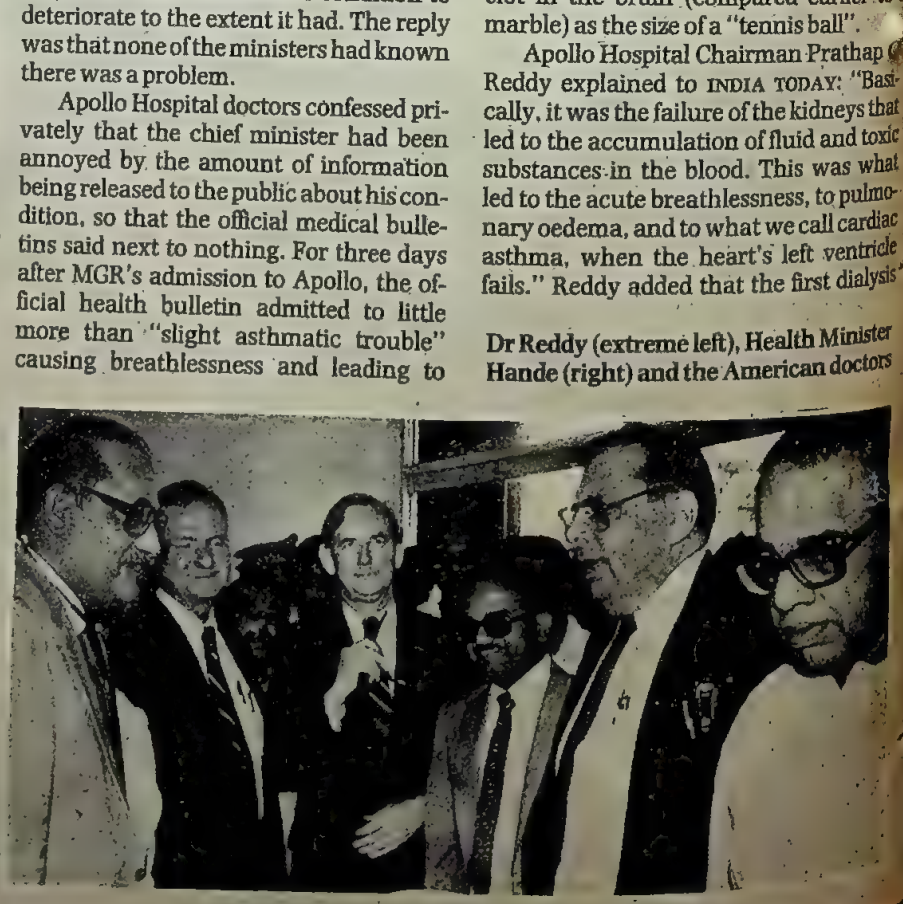
Three months before his hospitalisation, MGR had called in the well-known nephrologist. M.K. Mani, to look at his kidney problem. Mani had once been at Bombay's Jaslok Hospital, where he had treated Jayaprakash Narayan during and after the Emergency. But he had moved recently to Apollo Hospital in Madras, and after he looked at MGR, he recommended a careful work regimen, a strict diet and possible hospitalisation.

All the indications are that the chief minister ignored Mani's advice. And his kidney ailment remained a well-kept secret. Soon after MGR's hospitalisation, an opposition leader in the state asked a cabinet minister how he and his cabinet colleagues had allowed MGR's condition to deteriorate to the extent it had. The reply was that none of the ministers had known there was a problem.

Apollo Hospital doctors confessed privately that the chief minister had been annoyed by the amount of information being released to the public about his condition, so that the official medical bulletins said next to nothing. For three days after MGR's admission to Apollo, the official health bulletin admitted to little more than "slight asthmatic trouble" causing breathlessness and leading to "mild renal impairment". It was left to the local newspapers to dig out the fact that MGR had been put on dialysis 14 hours after his hospitalisation, a fact that was officially admitted only three days later. Even when MGR suffered a crippling stroke, the health bulletin strove to underplay his condition.

This led eventually to a major credibility gap that was bridged only after four doctors from the US described the gravity of the patient's condition in graphic language that left no room for guess work. They told a press conference that there was "not a chance" of MGR's total recovery, both his kidneys had "totally failed", it would be months before he would be able to return to normal life, and there would be a permanent impairment of his speech and a permanent limp in his right leg. Also, a neurologist from the US team described the swelling around the clot in the brain (compared earlier to a marble) as the size of a "tennis ball".

Apollo Hospital Chairman Prathap C. Reddy explained to INDIA TODAY: "Basically, it was the failure of the kidneys that led to the accumulation of fluid and toxic substances in the blood. This was what led to the acute breathlessness, to pulmonary oedema, and to what we call cardiac asthma, when the heart's left ventricle fails." Reddy added that the first dialysis



Dr Reddy (extreme left), Health Minister Hande (right) and the American doctors



RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Curious crowd outside the hospital

done on MGR had pulled out 7.5 litres of excess fluid (leaving behind the normal quantity of 5 litres).

The first dialysis was followed by another, a week later. But within hours of this, MGR suffered the biggest setback of the fortnight in the form of a stroke that paralysed his right side. Only a day earlier, MGR had told the Governor, S.L. Khurana, who called on him, that he hoped to attend office in two days' time. But now, he was in semi-coma, and the treatment of the kidneys was relegated to the background as the neurological problem became the focus of attention.

The American doctors who had been called in said that a kidney transplant could be done once the patient's condition stabilised, and said the operation had a success rate of over 75 per cent provided the kidney donor was a close relative. Two donors were soon lined up from among MGR's relatives. But a few days after the US doctors flew back home, MGR slipped into a coma again and developed fresh signs of breathlessness. Meanwhile, two Japanese experts had been called in to assess whether the brain problem could be tackled surgically.

Finally, more than two weeks after his admission the patient's blood urea, normally flushed out by the kidneys dropped as a result of dialysis every alternate day from its earlier level of 315 mg per 1000 cc of blood to under 100 mg (against the normal level of 40 mg), the temperature that resulted from an infection returned to normal, and MGR was even able to move his right arm in response to doctors' commands. The chief minister seemed finally on the road to recovery.

Apart from his concern for secrecy, MGR seems to have been an ideal patient. Said one of the doctors treating him: "For a VIP patient, he made absolutely no fuss, he was willing to listen to the doctors, and he was a good patient in every way." Another doctor said that despite his age (estimated to be around 70), "his body is in excellent shape, there is no flab, and he is in good condition".

Meanwhile, medical circles in Madras were agog with reports about Apollo doctors having mishandled the case. It was said that MGR's stroke was brought on by an excessive draining out of fluid during one of the dialysis sessions, leading to haemo-concentration (thickening of the blood) and the formation of a blood clot. It was also said that the VIP patient contracted his infection during one of the dialysis sessions.

But Apollo doctors dismissed these charges as resulting from professional jealousy, and Prathap Reddy ruled out haemo-concentration as the cause of the stroke. He also said the source of the infection that MGR had contracted was not known. "The chief minister was an ideal candidate for getting an infection. He could have got the infection from any catheter, or syringe or needle."

Apollo also got a good chit from the American doctors, who said in their report that, "Expert neurological, nephrologic and general medical care at the Apollo Hospital unquestionably saved and is currently sustaining Mr Ramachandran's life."

Ironically, Apollo itself was not very happy with the American doctors' involvement in the case. Prathap Reddy said: "I have no comments to make on who invited the American doctors. I don't know who picked them. If I pick doctors, I will pick them from the universities I know." The American doctors themselves were cagey about saying who had got in touch with them. T.K. Sreepada Rao, a dialysis expert at the Brooklyn medical centre, said he could not remember who had got in touch with him, but that he had helped contact the other three doctors who came with him: Eli Friedman of Brooklyn, John Meyer from Texas and Christopher Blagg from Washington.

Sources in Apollo also disclosed that Rao had made an attempt to take charge of the case, which would have meant sidelining Mani. But Mani, who has a no-nonsense reputation and is given to speaking bluntly, would have none of this. And when Mrs Gandhi had come calling a few days earlier, Mani had shot her a question straight from the hip: "How did it reflect on Indian doctors if people had to be called in from abroad for even simple problems like kidney failure?" Those present say that Mrs Gandhi was momentarily taken aback by the directness of the question, but then explained diplomatically that perhaps one had to see the issue from the patient's point of view as well. But Mani's point remained a valid one.

The hospital was, however, happier about the involvement of two Japanese experts, with Reddy saying that he had called them himself because of their experience with getting rid of clots in the brain and with doing by-pass surgery that gets around the blood clot. Unfortunately, neither technique could be resorted to immediately.

Towards month-end, however, MGR's condition seemed to be stabilising at last, and the long journey back to health seemed to have begun. How much MGR will recover still remains to be seen. But an Apollo doctor summed it up best when he said: "The recovery will take some months rather than weeks. But I have no doubt that a recovery is possible. Patients with far more complications have pulled through quite well, survived transplant operations, and recovered from the effects of strokes. There is no reason why MGR shouldn't do the same." For many, these words were reason for hope.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

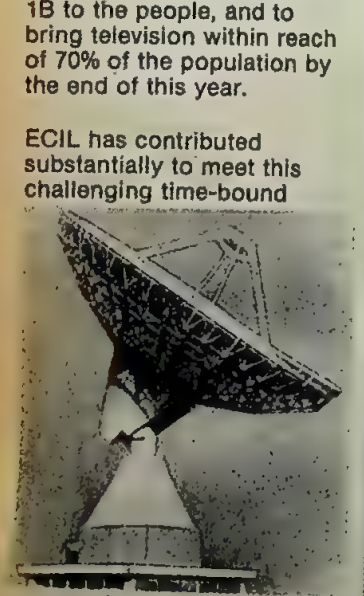
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have attended to some files before he suffered his stroke, and would logically have issued written instructions regarding the re-allocation of work if he had felt the need for this. Second, Governor Khurana had called on MGR in hospital the day that he is supposed to have orally instructed Nedunchezhiyan, but MGR did not mention the subject to Khurana. But Nedunchezhiyan was quick to counter categorically: "MGR orally instructed me in hospital before he suffered the stroke."

Khurana was meanwhile faced with a ticklish constitutional problem. The governor is supposed to act on the advice of the "council of ministers, headed by the chief minister". But with the chief minister out of action, could the cabinet give the governor advice that was constitutionally valid? Indeed, could the cabinet meet at all? And what should the course of action be if the chief minister remained unable to communicate for weeks on end because of his loss of speech and partial paralysis?

Khurana ruefully confessed: "The Constitution is silent on all these issues.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Jayalalitha: out in the cold

And I am taking legal advice on what to do." He called in the state Advocate-General, R. Krishnamurthy, and initially worked out a delicate compromise that came close to cutting constitutional corners. The cabinet would not meet, but the ministers would sit together informally to sort out files needing interministerial coordination. No major policy decisions would be taken. And the chief minister's advice would be sought as soon as he was in a position to clearly give it.

But towards the month-end, Nedunchezhiyan emerged as the de facto chief minister, signalling a temporary victory for him. Khurana issued a formal notification assigning the chief minister's portfolios to Nedunchezhiyan during the period of the chief minister's treatment, and said Nedunchezhiyan would also convene and preside over cabinet meetings in MGR's absence. Right on cue, DMK leader M. Karunanidhi criticised the "undue haste shown by the governor in allocating all the chief minister's portfolios to the finance minister".

These decisions followed official communications that Khurana received on October 20 and 21 from Nedunchezhiyan, from the chief secretary and from the private secretary to the chief minister, all stating that MGR had orally instructed

MGR as hero: idol of the masses





Nedunchezhiyan to look after his portfolios. And the advocate-general told the governor that the chief minister's oral instructions amounted to "advice" under the Constitution.

If that signalled the first phase of the leadership struggle in the party, Nedunchezhiyan sought to consolidate his position by immediately rushing to New Delhi for political consultations with Mrs Gandhi on holding the assembly elections (due only in June) simultaneously with the Lok Sabha poll, and on continuing the AIADMK-Congress(I) poll alliance. Nedunchezhiyan told newsmen in Delhi that even these actions of his were based on MGR's oral instructions a day before he suffered his stroke.

HOW THESE moves will be viewed by other leaders in the party remains to be seen. Nedunchezhiyan, despite his standing and seniority, is not a party heavyweight. He was the ranking minister in C.M. Annadurai's cabinet during 1967-69, but after Annadurai's death he was beaten in the succession struggle by M. Karunanidhi even though Nedunchezhiyan had been appointed acting chief minister during the final weeks of Annadurai's struggle against cancer.

In case MGR is now unable to return to active politics, will history repeat itself and Nedunchezhiyan be pipped at the post again? The AIADMK is not without ambitious politicians, including the Assembly Speaker K. Rajaram and Industry Minister C. Ponnaiyan. But the party strongman is R.M. Veerappan, the minister for information and religious endowments, who has been MGR's trusted aide for many years.

Their relationship goes back to MGR's film career, for Veerappan was the production manager for a number of MGR's films and has handled his finances as well. He has also been a key figure in the party as a patron of the chief minister's fan clubs, and a spokesman of the All-World MGR Manrams Association said that fully half the party's 130 MLA's were "patrons" of the fan clubs, and that all of them would back Veerappan in a leadership struggle.

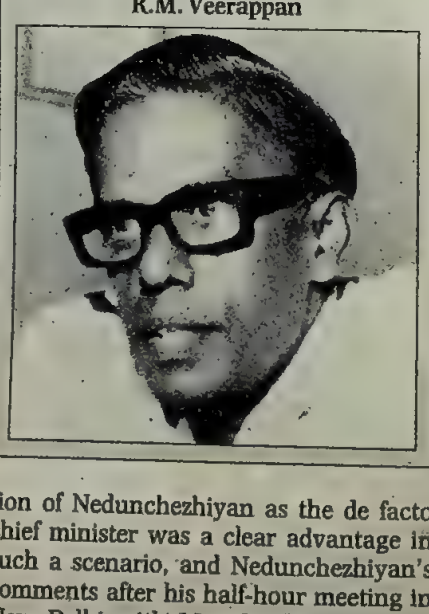
But Veerappan is also known to be lukewarm about the AIADMK's political alliance with the Congress(I). And in a situation where a confused party wonders which way to turn while its leader lies seriously ill, Mrs Gandhi might well want to call the shots within the AIADMK so that its alliance with the Congress(I) continues. For the Congress(I) an alliance with one of the Kazhagams is critical as the party has no machinery or leadership worth the name in the state. There is at least one leading member of the AIADMK cabinet who is known to be strongly inclined in favour of the Congress(I)—Electricity Minister S. Ramachandran—and Mrs Gandhi might well use him and Nedunchezhiyan to swing the party her way for the coming electoral battle. The installation of Nedunchezhiyan as the de facto chief minister was a clear advantage in such a scenario, and Nedunchezhiyan's comments after his half-hour meeting in New Delhi with Mrs Gandhi suggested that things had gone well. If these events were consolidated by other developments, the dice would clearly be loaded against Veerappan and any ambitions that he may have been nursing.



V.R. Nedunchezhiyan

V.R. Nedunchezhiyan took charge as the de facto chief minister, but R.M. Veerappan is the party strongman who has the backing of the MGR fan clubs.

R.M. Veerappan



But if the political picture appeared to present Mrs Gandhi with an opportunity to influence the decisions of the AIADMK, opposition leaders in the state were quick to point out that Mrs Gandhi had not lost a single opportunity in the past to wreck regional parties by fostering dissension within. A prominent politician in the state mentioned how she had used G.M. Shah in Jammu & Kashmir to split the National Conference, N. Bhaskara Rao in Andhra Pradesh to divide the Telugu Desam, and way back in 1972, Mohan Kumaramangalam to drive a wedge between Karunanidhi and MGR, so that MGR formed a new party after splitting the DMK. Might she now not try to split the AIADMK too so that the hold of the Kazhagams over the state's politics is broken, enabling the Congress(I) to step into the breach? On the other hand, the AIADMK is now an ally of the Congress(I), and it would be in Mrs Gandhi's interest to keep it together so that it fights the elections with a united front.

Certainly, the AIADMK is not without its internal divisions and schisms. At one level, there are those in the party who favour the alliance with the Congress(I), and those who oppose such an alliance. At another, the party is split down the middle between old DMK stalwarts who shifted their allegiance to the AIADMK and others who came into the party from the film world. If MGR does not recover quickly enough to return to active political life fairly soon, factional tussles within the party could well cause an open split, especially in the absence of a charismatic leader with a mass following.

Political pundits considered this a possibility because the Dravidian thrust to the Kazhagam parties in Tamil Nadu had been somewhat diluted in the AIADMK, with MGR almost deliberately fuzzing the party's sense of identity while giving it no new direction and purpose. At its root, this was because MGR had no strong political beliefs, not even the sense of a political mission. His initiatives in government have been restricted to a clutch of welfare measures aimed at magnifying his earlier image as a man who gave things to the poor. Thus, he gave the state's schoolchildren free midday meals, wrote off small farmers' loans and declared that electricity would be supplied to them free of charge. But while these confirmed his reputation as a benefactor, the AIADMK's sense of political identity remained fuzzy.

The Dravidian movement had been founded 40 years ago on a rationalist, regionalist platform that also took in an anti-Brahminism aimed at promoting the

interests of the state's backward classes, and later an anti-Hindi plank as well. The rationalist ethos took a severe knock last month, with leading politicians and millions of the chief minister's fans flocking to the thousands of temples in the state to pray for his speedy recovery. The regional thrust of Dravidian politics had taken a beating even earlier with MGR distancing himself from the opposition parties that demanded more power for the states and not taking part in the walk-out at the meeting of the National Development Council earlier this year.

MGR ALSO failed to criticise the Centre when N.T. Rama Rao's government in Andhra Pradesh was dismissed in August. And the anti-Brahmin plank of the platform can carry little conviction when the chief minister's favourite politician, Jayalalitha, as well as a cabinet minister, H.V. Hande, are both Brahmins. MGR has also soft-pedalled on the Hindi issue, and has not been as vociferous as Karunanidhi in espousing the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Indeed, the surest indication of MGR's desire to water down the regional character of his politics came some years ago, when he renamed his Anna DMK as the All-India Anna DMK. And opposition politicians in the state now talk of harping on regionalism, state autonomy and an anti-Hindi stance as part of their strategy in the coming election campaign.

But an academician in Madras argued: "You can't blame MGR for the weakening impulse of the Dravidian movement. The people in this state happen to be religious and temple-going, so rationalism cannot work. And when the state depends on the Centre for money, an anti-Centre stance makes no sense." A civil servant in the state added: "I would welcome the playing down of the Dravidian ethos. It is good to be less chauvinistic and more nationalist in one's outlook."

Whatever the merits and demerits, the AIADMK could be divided between those who would like to go back to a clear-cut Dravidian platform and those less steeped in the ethos of Dravidian politics. But while the party was caught in an indecisive mood, it had a major plus point in the state-wide emotional upsurge caused by MGR's illness. Nedunchezhiyan read the state mood correctly when he said that this would yield handsome rewards at the hustings. The new MGR wave also had the immediate effect of silencing all criticism of the chief minister. In the state's emotionally charged atmosphere, any negative comments might have appeared to be in bad taste.

But the opposition politicians were quick to trim their sails to the prevailing wind in an effort to retrieve lost ground without offending public sentiment. In a sense, they did the only thing they could: draw a line between the chief minister and his cohorts, arguing that while they held MGR dear, his partymen were both corrupt and incompetent; and clinging on to MGR only for the spoils of office.



M. Karunanidhi

The DMK's M. Karunanidhi positioned himself well for the coming elections, while the AIADMK rebel, S.D. Somasundaram, could be a key factor in three or four districts.

S.D. Somasundaram



S.D. Somasundaram, powerful as a political factor in three or four districts and armed with a reputation for both honesty and administrative ability, had only a month earlier been accusing the chief minister of corruption. Now he said: "As a man, I love him. My pain (because of MGR's illness) is much more than of the people by his side. They are close to him just because they want power....I wish that MGR should come quickly back to his usual life."

Karunanidhi, chief minister for seven years until 1976 and commonly credited with being the shrewdest politician in the state, went one better. The DMK leader wrote an emotional open letter to MGR in *Murasoli*, the paper edited by his nephew Murasoli Maran, and struck a note that was carefully calculated to pluck at the heart-strings.

Karunanidhi recalled the days 40 years ago when he and MGR used to share a flat in a Coimbatore suburb, hire a horse-cart for 2 annas (12 paise) for a ride into town, eat together in a restaurant with friends and discuss politics. He then recalled how he had once insisted that MGR play the lead role in a film for which Karunanidhi had written the script and how on another occasion MGR had insisted that Karunanidhi should write the script for his film. He also recalled how MGR had led a crowd to Egmore station in Madras to receive Karunanidhi after his release from jail following a political agitation, and how MGR bodily lifted Karunanidhi to carry him through the crowd, in the process losing his expensive watch.

The powerfully and emotively written piece then went on to say that in the last 12 years (since MGR founded the AIADMK), they had followed different paths, but that this could not wipe out their earlier association of over 30 years. And he ended with the hope that MGR would come back with his smile and give Karunanidhi once again the joy of political debate.

The masterful piece was almost certainly designed to try and capitalise on the wave of sympathy for MGR, to claim some of MGR's legacy as Karunanidhi's own, and perhaps at a later stage to assert that MGR's political colleagues had less of a claim to this legacy than Karunanidhi himself. Whether the tactic will work or not remains to be seen, but the Opposition strategy for the elections is already clear.

For good measure, Karunanidhi undertook a quick tour of South Arcot district to test the political waters, and to give a call for the Dravidian parties to resist the attempts of the Congress(I) to make inroads into Tamil Nadu politics. This was another cleverly designed strategy laying the ground for welcoming AIADMK cadres and politicians back into the DMK fold should the AIADMK split in the coming months. Discussions within the top echelons of the DMK have apparently centred on

THE ADMINISTRATION

Mixed Record

CHARISMATIC leaders tend to be populist in their policy initiatives, and M.G. Ramachandran has been no different. Heading a state administration that did little for over seven years to earn the respect of the opinion makers in the state, MGR will nevertheless go down in the state's and the country's history as the man who introduced the most far-sighted welfare measure that any state has undertaken: free midday meals for 8 million schoolchildren in Tamil Nadu. Critics in the opposition DMK tend to point a finger at the fact that education itself has taken a back seat in the process because of the teachers' preoccupation with getting the meals ready, and that the annual expenditure of Rs 200 crore could have been better spent on investments that create jobs and wealth. But there is little doubt that, as N. Ram, associate editor of *The Hindu*, says: "The midday meal must be commended as the least that a government can do in a state which has so many poor and landless."

The rest of the AIADMK Government's record since 1977 is, however, very mixed. More than seven years ago, MGR led the party that he had founded in 1972 to a triumphant victory in the state assembly elections, campaigning on an anti-corruption platform. This had gone down well at a time when numerous charges of corruption were being laid at the door of the DMK government led by the redoubtable M. Karunanidhi. The matinee idol-turned-politician repeated his triumph in 1980, although his party had done poorly in the parliamentary elections a mere six months earlier.

But last month, before MGR was taken ill, the political mood in the state had witnessed a sea change. MGR himself faced a host of corruption charges, his administration was generally seen as inefficient, and a series of by-election results pointed to waning support for the state's ruling party. Cho Ramaswamy, editor of the Tamil fortnightly *Tughlak* and a member of the Janata Party in the state, summed it up when he said: "There was a growing disillusionment with the AIADMK Government."

By all accounts, decision-making in the Government was centralised in MGR's hands, so that files moved slowly, if at all. The chief minister had an obsessive concern with secrecy, the administrative machinery had become demoralised, there was a new element of police repression in the state, and the use of the intelligence machinery for political eavesdropping led to an air of suspicion and fear that also pointed to the Government's poor record concerning civil rights. An anti-press law put journalists in the dock, and the Government was generally perceived as being anti-labour. Finally, the prohibition policy had developed into a farce, with almost everyone in the state drinking openly in spite of a law that prescribed mandatory imprisonment for anyone caught drinking without a permit.



Free meals for schoolchildren: far-sighted measure

Industry was no happier, with businessmen complaining that even political contributions failed to get decisions from the state Government. Said one disillusioned industrial magnate: "Under the earlier DMK government, you were sure of results if you paid the price. But now, even if you pay up, there is no certainty you will get what you want."

Economic performance was lacklustre. Growth rates for Tamil Nadu have been lower than the national average in recent years, there has been no new burgeoning of industry, the power shortage has developed into a major crisis, the state faces a serious water problem, and civic facilities in the cities have deteriorated rapidly. Tamil Nadu used to rank third in the state-wise listing of industrial licences issued, but has slipped much lower in recent years. The state's budgetary position has, however, been relatively comfortable, but this is largely because of the Rs 200 crore and more that comes in every year from the excise on liquor, and because the state's revenue-collection machinery, apart from being traditionally effective, was till recently in the care of the efficient S.D. Somasundaram.

Over all, it is not a record to boast about, and points to a chief minister who has had no clear-cut perceptions of how to take the state forward. And Karunanidhi said that the issues he would pose before voters in the coming elections would be the need for an effective administration, and the need to check corruption. The DMK's Assistant Secretary, Nanchil K. Manoharan, added for good measure that: "What Tamil Nadu needs now is a government that works, not a paralysed government in which no one takes responsibility."

But none of these issues figure in public debates as prominently as corruption. The AIADMK was swept into power in 1977 in the wake of the findings of the Sarkaria Commission, which had been appointed by the Centre to look into charges of corruption against the DMK government. But two months ago, revenue minister S.D. Somasundaram was thrown out of the AIADMK after he raised a lot of dust about corruption in the state administration.

The first major scandal erupted in 1981, when Karunanidhi startled the Legislative Assembly with documents, letters and telex messages relating to a questionable ship purchase proposed by the state-owned Poompuhar Shipping Corporation. Karunanidhi charged that while a Bulgarian shipyard was prepared to supply three 38,000 DWT (deadweight tonne) ships for $ 10.5 million each, the state Government was trying to push up the price to $ 13 million in order to pocket the difference through kickbacks. MGR had then told the Assembly that he was

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



prepared to face an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge, but the inquiry never took place then or later.

Later, Poompuhar negotiated a deal for three ships with a West German shipyard at a price of Rs 33.33 crore each. But the German price was some 50 per cent higher than the going rates quoted by Japanese and South Korean yards, and the Shipping Development Fund Committee in New Delhi negatived the proposal. Poompuhar was asked to buy the ships from Japan or Korea, but no deal has yet been struck.

AFTER shipping in troubled waters, the state Government has been floundering in arrack. During the last elections, MGR had sworn that he would never relax prohibition, whatever the provocation. But that is precisely what he soon did under the pretext of curbing the evil of illicit distillation. And though prohibition remains formally in force, Tamil Nadu is now one of the wettest states in the country. There are 10 distilleries and over 15,000 liquor shops in the state, and an arrack blending and bottling unit in every district.

Arrack blending is a particularly paying proposition, since all that is involved is diluting rectified spirit with water in a ratio of 1:3. But the price difference to be gained through this is enormous. Rectified spirit costs just Rs 2.50 per bulk litre, while a 750 ml bottle of arrack sells for Rs 20. A good bit of the price difference is made up by excise duties, but the profit margins remain enormous. And Somasundaram has gone on record as saying that MGR had not relished his levying penalties on the blending units which did not fulfil their licence conditions. Soon enough, Somasundaram lost his excise portfolio amid charges that the state Government had been beholden to the blending units in some way or the other.

There was a similar dust-up over the granting of licences for the wholesale and retail distribution of arrack and Indian made foreign liquor, with charges being aired about favoured parties getting the bulk of the wholesale business at the cost of established companies.

There have been other accusations too. In one case the state Government had planned to nationalise all privately operated bus transport, but the move was shelved, allegedly after money changed hands. In another better documented case, private individuals were able to organise the shifting of bank deposits belonging to the state Agricultural Marketing Board from one nationalised bank to another. With each shift, the persons involved used to get handsome loans from the banks as a reward for bringing in hefty deposits, and the loans would not be repaid. While the banks were thus defrauded, the question that needs to be answered is how the Agricultural Marketing Board allowed its bank deposits to be shifted from bank so bank at the whim of private individuals.

Put together, all these have led to the political air being charged with cries of corruption. But MGR is on a better wicket than Karunanidhi was in 1977 on one count: the Justice T. Ramaprasad Rao Commission of inquiry has exonerated all state ministers, including MGR, on the granting of liquor licences. And MGR's illness now makes it difficult for the Opposition to criticise him or question his honesty. Somasundaram, for instance, said last fortnight that "it is against Tamilian culture to criticise a man who is ill." Nevertheless, there is little doubt that if corruption is going to be an issue in the coming elections, the Opposition and not the AIADMK will make capital of it.

the possibility that a politically inactive MGR will lead to disintegration of the AIADMK, so that the DMK will once again become the focus of Dravidian aspirations. One political observer said that "Karunanidhi is so confident about the coming elections that he is already acting as if he is the chief minister."

But any such presumption would be premature, partly because the fate of the next elections hinges critically on MGR's condition, and partly because in normal electoral arithmetic, an alliance between the AIADMK and the Congress(I) should be unbeatable. Previous elections have shown that the AIADMK can bank on between 30 and 40 per cent of voter support, while the Congress(I), despite having virtually no cadre base or party machinery in the state, can bring in up to 20 per cent of the vote. The Congress(I) vote will be even more assured in a parliamentary poll, since the Tamil Nadu electorate has repeatedly backed any alliance featuring the Congress(I). This was true in 1971, 1977 and 1980. And it could well prove true again in 1985.

Against this, the DMK can count on assured voter support of over 25 per cent. The smaller parties with which it has allied (including the communist parties and the Janata) could boost this to the region of 35 per cent, but this falls short of what is required to best the AIADMK-Congress(I) combine. Nevertheless, the DMK had done well in recent by-elections, capturing two of the four assembly seats for which elections were held last summer, and there had seemed to be a clear swing in its favour in the urban constituencies. On top of this, S.D. Somasundaram is certain to enter into seat adjustments with the DMK, a factor that will help in the Tanjore, Madurai, Tiruchi and Pudukottai districts, which are Somasundaram's strongholds. Finally, the AIADMK had won 30 of its 130 Assembly seats in 1980 by margin smaller than 3,000 votes; and a slight swing towards the DMK could find these seats going to Karunanidhi when the next assembly elections are held.

In the final analysis, however, the political situation remains more fluid than it has ever been in the recent past. There is little doubt that the AIADMK had been losing support in recent months. But the minute MGR fell ill, this became history. So every political calculation last fortnight depended vitally on how quickly and how effectively MGR would recover, and whether and how soon he would return to active political life.

—T.N. NINAN
and S.H. VENKATRAMANI

PSEPHOLOGY

Key Position

TAMIL NADU, with its continually changing alliances, is a psephological nightmare. Nevertheless, there are a number of surprisingly regular patterns in the voting trends of the electorate that indicate a fairly high degree of sophistication in voter behaviour. Although issues play virtually no role in the decision on who to vote for—the two main parties have few ideological differences—there has always been a clear choice that faces the electorate. This is because, unlike the rest of the country where politicians find alignments so difficult to forge, seat adjustments and united fronts are skillfully and relatively painlessly worked out in Tamil Nadu. The result is that over the last few elections there have been two major candidates in most constituencies, each representing one of the two united fronts.

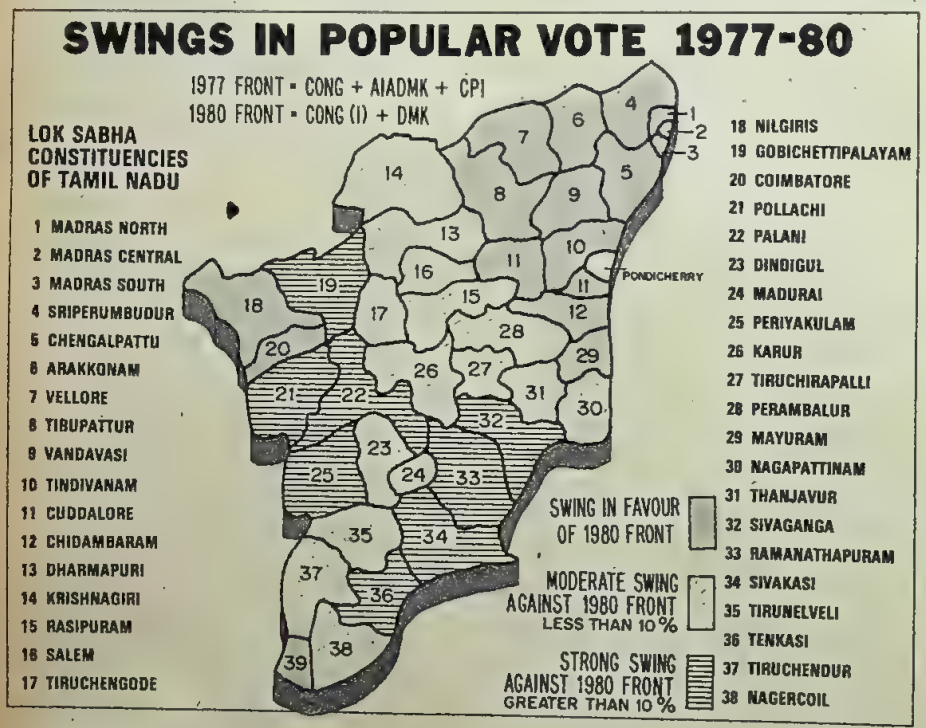
AS A result of effective working alliances in each election since 1967 the index of opposition unity (IOU)—a scale which varies from zero to 100, a higher mark on the index indicating greater unity—has been remarkably high in this state. Over the last five general elections the IOU in Tamil Nadu has averaged 86.8, much above the national average and in comparison with other states it ranks second only to its politically mature neighbour, Kerala, where the IOU has been 90.2 over the same period. These two states clearly show that effective opposition unity does not depend on the number of parties in the fray but on how successfully these parties form tactical alliances and fight elections as a united front. This has been true in the last four elections in Tamil Nadu where the IOU has hovered around a high 90, a level comparable to the IOU's achieved in western democracies.

The political skill necessary in forming united fronts and agreeing on seat adjustments is seen nowhere better than in the story of the Congress in this state. The last time the Congress stood alone at the hustings was in 1967 when it was all but wiped out—winning only three of the 39 seats it contested. Since then it has always been in an alliance with one of the two major parties: the DMK and the AIADMK.

Although any effort to compute the strength of each party involves dealing with a large number of imponderables (*see box*) a rough estimate of the relative support of each would suggest that the Congress(I) commands 15-20 per cent of the vote, about half the support of either the DMK or the AIADMK who individually could muster 30-35 per cent of the vote.

However, despite being the weakest of the three parties in terms of its electoral base, the Congress(I) is in a pivotal position which places it in an extremely strong bargaining position. Its strength lies in the pure arithmetic of the situation. The Congress(I) adds a 15-20 per cent vote to whichever side it allies with and if this accumulated to its partner's base of 35 per cent, the alliance is almost certain to sweep the election with 50-55 per cent of the vote. This has been the story in each election—the party that does not ally with the Congress is all but wiped out: the AIADMK won only 2 seats in 1980 and the DMK won only one in 1977.

The fortuitous position puts the Congress(I) in a dominant role in the negotiations for seat adjustments. But it took a while for this to dawn on the Congress leadership. In 1971, after its debacle of 1967, the Congress gingerly accepted only 9 seats compared to 23 for its alliance partner, the DMK. Both parties won every seat contested. In 1977 the Congress could trade with both the DMK and the AIADMK but it still accepted an offer of 15 seats from the AIADMK which took 20 seats itself. Once again the Congress alliance did well, winning 32 of the 35 seats it contested. Finally in 1980 the Congress(I)'s key position enabled it to bargain for a majority of the seats in the alliance with the DMK: the Congress was allocated 22 seats and the DMK only 16 seats. A similar arrangement is ex-



Map by B.K. SHARMA

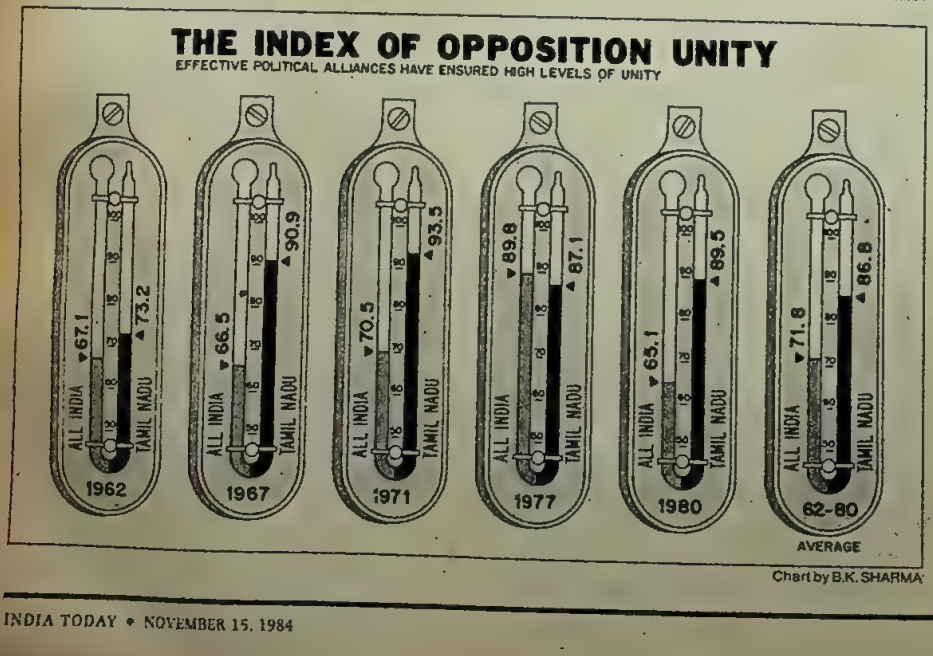


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

pected this time between the Congress(I) and the AIADMK, with the former getting a majority of seats in the alliance even though it is by far the weaker party. Political negotiations between parties forming a united front are like a market for seats, a market that works well in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, unlike the north where it fails miserably.

Once an alliance is formed, it has an identity of its own. Supporters of each of the alliance partners seem to freely transfer their vote to whichever partner's candidate is standing from their constituency. This is consistently reflected in how near each other are the average votes of the two parties in each electoral alliance (*see box*). In 1980 the Congress(I) got a 56.6 average vote and its partner, the DMK got 55.3. Similarly, in 1977 the Congress got 58 per cent and its ally, the AIADMK, got 56.1. It is, however, noticeable that the Congress gets a slightly higher vote per cent each time than the other party in the front. This suggests that there may be a small minority of Congress supporters who prefer not to vote for the alliance when a Congress candidate does not stand from their constituency and a candidate from the front contests instead. This is perhaps a reflection of dissidence and disapproval at not being allocated the particular seat.

Uniform swings for alliances also reflect that by and large the Tamil Nadu electorate views the alliance as a unified entity. Between 1977 and 1980 there was an average swing—computed here as a change in votes from the 1977 front to the 1980 front and not for individual parties —against the Congress(I)-DMK front of over 2 per cent. In the constituencies with DMK candidates, the swing away averaged 2.88 per cent and the seats with Congress candidates also showed a remarkably similar swing away averaging 2.84 per cent. Similarly, a comparison of the 1971 and 1977 elections shows a swing towards the 1977 front of 3.6 per cent in constituencies with AIADMK candidates and a swing of 3.1 per cent in seats where Congress candidates were contesting.

This uniformity in swings is also reflected in the regions across the state in a constituency-wise analysis of the swings between 1977 and 1980. While there was a general swing away from the Congress(I)-DMK front between these two elections, the DMK clearly has much greater support in the north-eastern part of Tamil Nadu—covering 13 constituencies—where there was a definite swing in favour of the 1980 front.

—PRANNOY ROY

MAIN ALLIANCE PARTIES IN TAMIL NADU*

Election	Congress Alliance	vs	Opposing Alliance
1980	Congress(I) + DMK		ADMK + CPI + CPM + Janata
1977	Congress + AIADMK + CPI		DMK + INC(O) + SWA
1971	Congress + DMK + CPI		INC(O) + SWA
1967	Congress		DMK + CPM + SWA
1962	Congress		DKM

*Madras before 1971

ELECTORAL RECORD IN TAMIL NADU

Election		CONG	DMK	AIADMK	OTHERS	TOTAL
1980	Seats won	20	16	2	1	39
	Seats Contested	22	16	24	—	—
1977	Seats won	14	1	18	6	39
	Seats Contested	15	19	20	—	—
1971	Seats won	9	23	—	7	39
	Seats Contested	9	23	—	—	—

Party Strength

WHILE it is virtually impossible to accurately assess the individual support of the three main contenders in Tamil Nadu, a look at their record over the last decade can reveal some rough indicators of the relative strength of each. The table shows the average support that each party received only in the constituencies in which it contested.

In 1977 when the DMK fought the elections alone—apart from the assistance of other less important parties—it secured 37.3 per cent of the vote. Similarly, when the AIADMK stood independently in 1980 it got 40.8 per cent of the vote in the 24 seats it contested. Assuming that their minor alliance partners accounted for about 5 per cent of the vote as their earlier record would suggest, the DMK and the AIADMK would then probably account for 30-35 per cent of the electorate each, with a slight edge to the AIADMK.

The Congress vote when it is part of an alliance with either the DMK or the AIADMK has remained remarkably stable between 56 and 58 per cent in each of the elections. Similarly, the support of these two parties increases from their stand-alone base of around 37-40 per cent up to 55-56 per cent when they form an alliance with the Congress.

PARTY-WISE PERCENTAGE VOTE*

ELECTION	CONG	DMK	AIADMK
1980 Congress(I) + DMK alliance	56.6	55.3	40.8
1977 Congress + AIADMK alliance	58.0	37.3	56.1
1971 Congress + DMK alliance	56.8	54.3	—

*Average percentage vote in only those constituencies contested by each party

These figures, therefore, suggest that the Congress support in the state ranges at around 15-20 per cent of the electorate. That is, it would get about one-fifth of the votes if there was a three cornered fight in any election, with independents and others accounting for about 10 per cent.

Among the factors that complicate these computations are the swings that occur between elections and the cross voting that may occur when alliances are formed with some of the supporters of the individual parties preferring not to vote for the front partner. Nevertheless, as a rough guide to the electoral support there are a number of consistent elements in the table's figures which suggest that the Congress(I) has 15-20 per cent of the vote, the DMK and AIADMK have about 30-35 per cent each with the AIADMK, perhaps, having 2 per cent greater support than the DMK. An accurate assessment of each party's vote can, however, only be measured by an opinion poll.

INDIA-PAKISTAN

More Sabre-rattling

THE REFRAIN is beginning to sound like a stuck record. The headlines are appropriately alarmist: "War clouds on horizon: PM"..."Pak intensifies firing, pours in troops"..."PM calls on defence forces to be vigilant"..."PM warns of war threat". At any other time, such headlines would have indicated the appalling possibility of military conflict. Coming as they do on the eve of elections, they do no such thing. Indeed, outside the coterie of decision-makers at the very top of the Government, and the handful of people who advise them, no one is taking this sabre-rattling very seriously.

But it would be a mistake to dismiss it as just so much pre-election rhetoric, couched though it is in rhetorical terms and coming as it does on the eve of the elections. Indeed, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would be a lesser politician if she didn't try and seize on every possible issue to gain political mileage before the upcoming election, and what better appeal to the electorate than as a defender of their security.

That, unfortunately, is not the end of this story. India's relations with Pakistan, which one senior diplomat described as being accident-prone, needing constant first-aid, have just suffered a catastrophic accident and it will take more than mere first-aid to put things right. In the process, not only has the delicate India-Pakistan dialogue been thrown out of the window—as evidenced by the indefinite postponement of official talks on Pakistan's proposed no-war pact, and India's proposed friendship treaty—India's relations with Pakistan's ally, the United States, have also taken a similar sharp downward plunge.

While talk of war has left most people bewildered if not downright cynical, it is clear that the downturn has to do with India's perception of Pakistan's involvement with Bhindranwale's terrorists, in what is now being freely spoken of in government circles as help in training the extremists, giving them arms and now sanctuary. True, Rajiv Gandhi, MP, has been talking about the danger of war since the beginning of the year, but the official cooldown became significant only after Operation Bluestar. It has now climaxed, and October, otherwise a month of clear, crisp skies, has witnessed a monsoon of war clouds ever since Home Secretary M. M. K. Wali made the first specific official accusation in Srinagar on October 4 that the Government now had evidence of Pakistan's involvement.

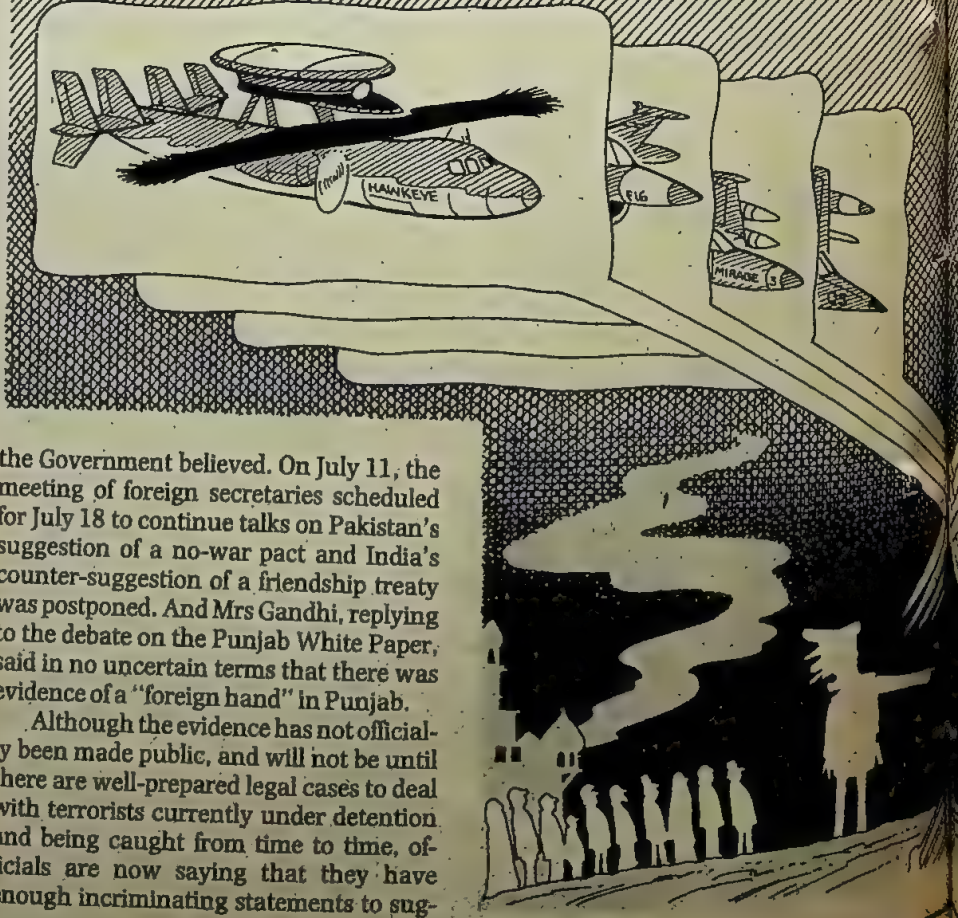
The India-Pakistan dialogue was hardly in good shape before Operation Bluestar. But till early July, one month after the army action, it was still business as usual. Information Minister H. K. L. Bhagat flew to Islamabad on July 8 to ask his counterpart if he couldn't guarantee a fairer coverage of Indian, particularly Punjab news in the Pakistani media. And Foreign Minister Yakub Khan hitched a lift with his Indian counterpart to a meeting of the South Asia Regional Committee (SARC) in Male, Maldives, a day later.

But when Pakistan decided it wasn't going to return the hijackers of the Indian Airlines airbus from Srinagar, the dialogue was abruptly frozen. Pakistan's handling of the hijack, commended at first, was suddenly suspect. The use of certain code words by the leader of the hijackers seemed to indicate that his arrival in Lahore wasn't entirely unexpected—or so the Government believed. On July 11, the meeting of foreign secretaries scheduled for July 18 to continue talks on Pakistan's suggestion of a no-war pact and India's counter-suggestion of a friendship treaty was postponed. And Mrs Gandhi, replying to the debate on the Punjab White Paper, said in no uncertain terms that there was evidence of a "foreign hand" in Punjab.

Although the evidence has not officially been made public, and will not be until there are well-prepared legal cases to deal with terrorists currently under detention and being caught from time to time, officials are now saying that they have enough incriminating statements to suggest that the terrorists were trained at specific locations across the border (INDIA TODAY, October 15). And enough absconders have been caught on the border trying to sneak into Pakistan to suggest that they find a welcoming sanctuary there away from prosecution in India. Indian suspicions were again fuelled when passengers in the second hijacked Indian Airlines plane claimed that the hijackers had been given a gun at Lahore airport.

All this isn't, of course, the same thing as a war threat from Pakistan. The lyrics for that particular refrain have drawn inspiration from yet another evergreen on India's diplomatic horizon: American arms aid to Pakistan. Senator Alan Cranston, the minority whip in the United States Senate, was on to a good thing when he decided to introduce an amendment in the American aid package to Pakistan—worth a staggering US $3.2 billion or Rs 3,840 crore—making it conditional on Pakistan to renounce nuclear weapons. That, after all, was one of the two avowed purposes of US arms aid to Pakistan (the other being protection against trouble from Afghanistan).

Not only was Cranston's amendment not taken up for want of time before the US Congress adjourned for the elections due

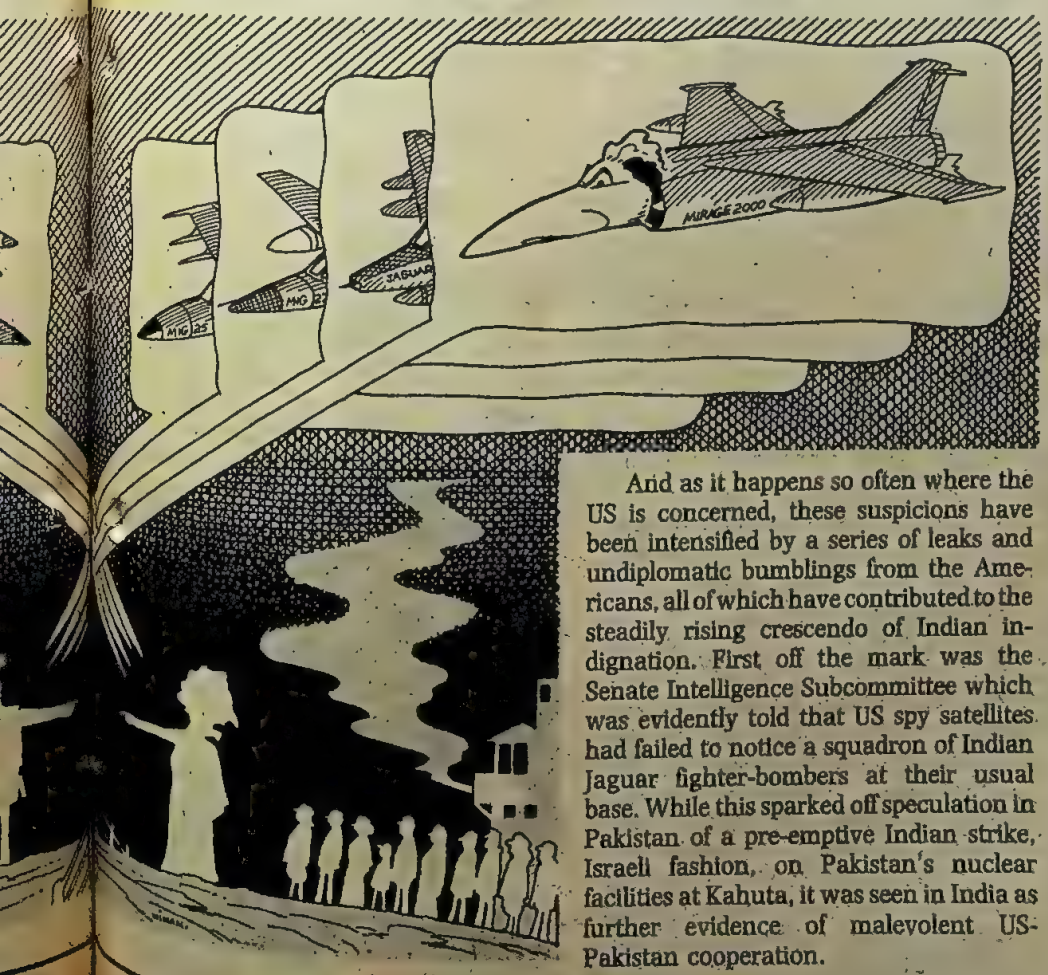


this fortnight, it became clear that the US administration was considering the supply of the sophisticated Airborne Early Warning (AEW) surveillance plane, the Grumman E-2C Hawkeye which the Israelis used with such devastating effect against Syria in 1980, knocking out 81 Syrian fighters losing just one of their own in the process.

The Hawkeye, which is currently under discussion between the Pakistanis and Americans, would as the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis Director K. Subramaniam puts it, be a "force multiplier" for the 40 F-16s that the Pakistan airforce is getting. The computers aboard the Hawkeye are capable of tracking more than 300 enemy targets at once, and could keep the F-16s protected from Indian defences as well as directing them more efficiently to their targets. It would, quite simply, increase the effectiveness of the F-16 fleet many times, introducing yet another technological leap in the arms race in the sub-continent.

ALTHOUGH not as powerful as the Airborne Early Warning and Communications System (AWACS) which the US has approved for supply to Saudi Arabia, the Hawkeye is along with AWACS a complete American monopoly. No other country has anything like it and India's only answer—not the most reliable one at that— would be to get SAM 5s from the Soviet Union just as Syria did in a desperate bid to stop the Israeli slaughter.

The suspicion in South Block is that the Hawkeye indicates a new turn in the security relationship between Pakistan and the United States. The original aid package, half of which or $1.6 billion (Rs 1,920 crore) was for military purchases, comes to an end in 1986, and the Pakistanis are hardly likely to let it go at that. Zia, more than anyone else, recognises the fickle nature of American support. After all, in the months that followed Bhutto's hanging in 1979, not only was he shunned by his Arab friends, even Washington turned its back on him when the American Embassy in Islamabad was burnt down. If Zia was rescued by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he knows full well that a settlement in Afghanistan could deprive him of American interest—and military and economic support. Pakistan, therefore, is clearly seeking a new basis for its security relationship with the US which is based not on the Soviet presence in Afghanistan but on an American commitment to Pakistan's security.



And as it happens so often where the US is concerned, these suspicions have been intensified by a series of leaks and undiplomatic bumblings from the Americans, all of which have contributed to the steadily rising crescendo of Indian indignation. First off the mark was the Senate Intelligence Subcommittee which was evidently told that US spy satellites had failed to notice a squadron of Indian Jaguar fighter-bombers at their usual base. While this sparked off speculation in Pakistan of a pre-emptive Indian strike, Israeli fashion, on Pakistan's nuclear facilities at Kahuta, it was seen in India as further evidence of malevolent US-Pakistan cooperation.

Close on the heels of this followed a report last month in the Lahore daily, *Nawa-i-waqt*, to the effect that President Ronald Reagan had, in a letter to President Zia-ul-Haq, offered Pakistan a nuclear umbrella. While the nuclear umbrella part turned out to be a mistranslation from the Urdu to the English, and was promptly denied by the Americans, there was another point in the letter that raised hackles in the South Block. Reagan had, according to the *Nawa-i-waqt* report, leaked to its correspondent in Washington, offered Pakistan a security relationship of the kind that the US has with Japan and South Korea—implicitly accepting the Pakistani argument that their security relationship must transcend the immediate provocation posed by Afghanistan.

The Americans aren't willing to comment any further on the plea that presidential communications aren't for public discussion but this has confirmed suspicions in South Block that the Washington-Islamabad security link has more to it than is publicly admitted. As if this cacophony wasn't enough, the Americans chose precisely this moment to strike yet another wrong note. In Lahore last month, US Ambassador to Pakistan Dean R. Hinton faced a series of questions on the triangle of Indo-Pakistan-US relations from the Council on Strategic Studies in Lahore. Hinton maintained that the US didn't believe that India would attack Pakistan, but pushed on what the US would do if it did, Hinton chose to say that if there was "an attack, committed by anybody, of flagrant aggression" from the East, meaning India, "we will not be neutral". Hinton's predecessor had been more decisive in similar circumstances. In a keynote address in May 1982, Ronald I. Spiers declared: "We do not believe that Pakistan intends to attack India or that India intends to attack Pakistan."

That, barring a handful, is what most people on both sides of the border believe. If there is evidence to the contrary, neither government has chosen to disclose it. In the meantime, clashes on the border are given prominent display in the media and routine military exercises are cited as evidence of an impending conflict.

The blunt fact is that there isn't anything to fight about, not territory as in Kutch, not infiltrators as in Kashmir, not a liberation movement as in Bangladesh. Unless, of course, the Indian Government believes that the only way to get Pakistan off its tail in Punjab, to stop it from offering Sikh extremists shelter and help which New Delhi firmly believes it is doing, is to go to war.

—SUMAN DUBEY

THE OPPOSITION

Yet Another Combination

THE DALIT Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP), led by the octogenarian Chowdhary Charan Singh, and named and born on October 21 under sound astrological advice, finally put the lid on the now-on now-off talks of an across-the-board Opposition merger. Concocted hastily by a fusion of Charan Singh's Lok Dal, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, the Rashtriya Congress (RC) of Ratubhai Adani and some elements of the Janata Party disenchanted with Chandra Shekhar's leadership, the party looked jinxed from the word go. Of the three Janata men, Devi Lal, Karpoori Thakur and Kumbharam Arya, who had promised to join Singh earlier, only Lal turned up at the inaugural press conference. The impressive, if not ponderous, name of the party could not be announced at the press conference because it had not yet been decided. And, within 24 hours of the announcement, Atal Behari Vajpayee, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Lok Dal's partner in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), obviously hurt by Singh's unilateral move, said the NDA "stands dissolved" because there was no longer any such thing as the Lok Dal.

Thakur and Arya, thought as weighty leaders in their respective states of Bihar and Rajasthan, were obviously buying time. But the suddenness of the announcement took the rest of the Opposition by storm. "I think the latest development closes the vexed chapter of merger talks between us and the Chowdhary," said Madhu Dandavate, senior Janata leader. And his sentiment was ominously reciprocated by the architects of the state-of-the-art DMKP. Bahuguna openly contradicted Singh at the press conference where the latter mentioned that the Lok Dal's arrangement with the BJP would continue. At Bahuguna's insistence, a clause was written into the party's constitution to the effect that all future inclusions into the party would be decided upon not by Singh alone but by a panel comprising Singh, Bahuguna, Adani and Lal.

The party adopted the Lok Dal symbol of a man ploughing the field. The name was suggested by Lal at the last minute because others would not accept Singh's suggestion of naming it the Bharatiya Kranti Dal after the party that he had set up himself in 1967. Nor would Singh let the name—Lok Dal—continue because, according to one report, his astrologer had recommended at least three words in the name. The party described itself as "Gandhian", but said it had chosen October 21 to be the day of beginning because Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the man who had all along fought the Gandhian line in the Congress, was born on that day. There was abundant ideological confusion all along. The six-page policy statement promised a stringent anti-defection law grimly overlooking the irony involved: Bahuguna had defected half a dozen times in that many years while it was the defection of Charan Singh that caused the collapse of the Janata government in 1979.

There was a clear hint that the formation of the DMKP was a cynical and hurriedly-planned act giving a decent burial to the Lok Dal-Janata merger talks. "The talks were giving us a bad name," an aide of Singh later said. Its seed was sown a few days earlier when Thakur, Lal and Arya, representing the hard core pro-merger lobby in the Janata Party, threatened to quit it and join the Lok Dal. They had prepared a hard-hitting statement directed against Chandra Shekhar, but it was mollified later at the intervention of two leading journalists.

But anti-merger elements were equally aggressive in attacking Thakur and his colleagues. Echoing the sentiments of the leadership Dr Shanti Patel, Viresh Pratap Chaudhary and Subodh Kant, all members of the Janata national executive said: "It is preposterous to allege that there was any sabotage of the unity efforts or that it was due to any alleged Congress(I) infiltrators in the party." They chided Thakur for adopting a "policy of merger at all cost".

The Lok Dal-Janata merger failed to materialise due to the anti-Charan Singh feeling in a section of the Janata Party, particularly those from the south and the west where Lok Dal is non-existent. Even in the national executive meeting a view was expressed that making Charan Singh chief of the Janata would, in fact, adversely affect Janata's urban support in the west and the south where the party was well entrenched. In addition, the Janata Party decided to go slow on the merger issue because, in the new set up the former Congress (O) elements would not have received enough importance. But the main problem was Charan Singh himself known for changing his opinions and decisions without any reason. A senior Janata member from Maharashtra asked: "What is the guarantee that Charan Singh will issue the election symbol to the candidates selected by the parliamentary board?"

To thrash out this and many other related questions, the executive committee appointed an eight-member committee to formalise the proposals for talks with the Lok Dal. The move which came as an anti-climax to the euphoria built up earlier about the imminent merger, generated both anger and relief among the middle level leaders in various states. For some the committee was a shrewd move to postpone merger without annoying Charan Singh. Ironically, while Singh was sitting pretty in his northern heartland, it was the Janata's image which was being besmirched due to infighting.

While confusion prevailed over the merger moves, the United Front (UF) comprising the Congress(S), the Janata, the DSP, the Rashtriya Congress and the Janwadi Dal was also wrecked by internal pr-

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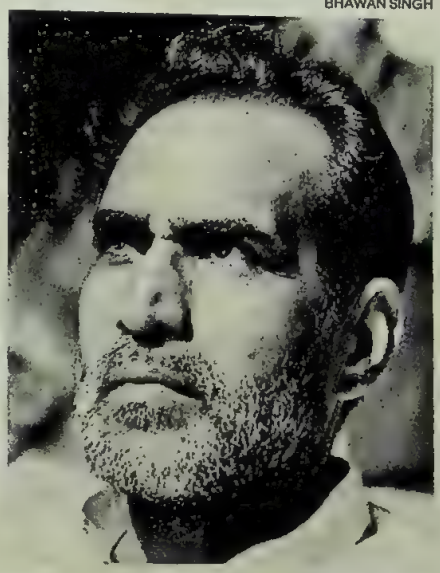
essures. Even after 18 months, the UF was neither able to finalise its policy statement nor evolve a definite election strategy for the Lok Sabha. Though they met over two dozen times in New Delhi and Bombay, their earlier plan of floating a united party seemed to have been aborted partly due to Janata's conciliatory overtures to the Lok Dal and partly due to the insistence of the Congress(S) to retain its own independent identity till a clear-cut national alternative to the Congress(I) emerged. But other letter-head parties like the Rashtriya Congress, the Janwadi Dal and individuals like I.K. Gujral, India's former ambassador to the USSR, and Mir Qasim, former AICC general secretary, were determined to force the UF partners to fight the election on a common symbol and programme.

Last fortnight, Gujral created a major embarrassment for the UF when he, in a hurriedly convened press conference declared that a decision had already been taken by all the UF partners to contest the election on the Janata symbol. He even announced that the UF would seek seat adjustments with all the parties including the Lok Dal with whom the Janata, the leading constituent of the UF, was negotiating a possible merger.

But before Gujral's optimistic assertion could have its impact, it was stoutly refuted by both Janata Party chief Chandra Shekhar and the top leaders of the Congress (S). Said V. Kishore Deo, the Congress(S) leader: "The party has not taken any decision about contesting the election on a common symbol. We are not aware of any decision taken by the leaders in their meetings but our working committee will give the final verdict. I must admit there are two views on the question of contesting election on the Janata Party symbol."

Ironically when Gujral was announcing UF's decision to contest on a common symbol, Bahuguna, representing an important constituent of the UF, along with Rashtriya Congress chief Adani, was negotiating with Charan Singh for launching the new party. Bahuguna also succeeded in involving Thakur, Lal and Arya during his dialogue with the Lok Dal emissaries led by its general secretary S.P. Malviya and Uttar Pradesh Lok Dal chief Mulayam Singh Yadav. Said Bahuguna:

BHAWAN SINGH





Chandra Shekhar (right) and Charan Singh with coalition colleagues

"I am all for Opposition unity so that anti-Congress (I) votes are pooled together in favour of a common Opposition candidate."

Seemingly fed up with the indecision at the top, the state units of the various parties have started taking decisions which are independent of the national leadership. To begin with in Gujarat, all the Opposition parties, including the Communists announced last month that they had decided to contest the election jointly and for which they constituted an election campaign also. In the neighbouring Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar took a lead in consulting all the Opposition parties. Said Pawar: "As far as Maharashtra is concerned there would not be any problem. For all practical purposes, the process of allotment of seats to various parties have already begun."

It was obvious that the state-level leaders were taking the initiative in bringing all the Opposition parties together in all the western and southern states. "The disunity in the Opposition ranks seems to be confined to the north only and there is no problem in the south," asserts Kishore Deo, "the problem arises when parties inflate their claims in regions and states and there is no acceptable common leader to sort out the intricacies."

Kishore Deo was not wide off the mark. The Opposition parties were able to sort out their differences only in those states where powerful local leaders dominated the scene —such as N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh, Biju Patnaik in Orissa, Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra and the BJP veteran Bhairon Singh Shekhawat in Rajasthan. For instance, there was no disagreement over allowing the leading role to the Congress(S) in Maharashtra, the BJP in Rajasthan, the Janata Party in Orissa and Rama Rao's Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh.

"The trouble with us in the Opposition", said Congress(S) MP Dharam Vir Sinha, "is that we lack realism and suffer from an inflated sense of ego." It is indeed the ego syndrome that explains why the tired, old men in the Opposition shift positions at the drop of a hat, form ever-changing combinations out of the same corny elements, and unleash new parties when the need of the hour is to betray new attitudes and new sensibilities. The thwarted Janata-Lok Dal merger and the ill-conceived beginning of the DMKP are the latest bench-marks in yet another one of the Opposition's senseless ego-trips and its determination to fritter away a gilt-edged opportunity to put the rule of the Gandhis to an end.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with SUMIT MITRA



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BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Directional Failure

THERE was both rhetoric and camaraderie at the meeting of the national council of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Pune last fortnight, but these did not hide the party leadership's failure to provide a clear-cut sense of direction to its members. Despite the customary efficiency, discipline and enthusiasm that invariably mark the BJP's conventions, resolutions were far too hastily drafted and speeches overly guarded at this annual coming together leaving the crucial queries as to what exactly the party stands for still unanswered.

The BJP leadership's ostrich like attitude at the convention towards signs of growing unreliability on the part of the Lok Dal, its partner of a year-and-a-half in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) cost it dearly. Just a week after the convention, the BJP was caught flat-footed when Lok Dal leader Charan Singh announced he was forming a new party, the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party. Vajpayee in Jammu hastily declared the dissolution of the alliance, though he did not rule out electoral adjustment with Singh's new conglomerate.

At the Pune convention, the BJP had tried desperately to play down differences with the Lok Dal despite rumblings from party workers. General Secretary L.K. Advani insisted that Singh was being misquoted by the press and that in any case Singh's increasing friendship with some Janata members did not affect the NDA arrangement one bit.

The BJP's election strategy outlined the call for a twofold plank to defeat the Congress(I) and acquire a sizeable presence in the Lok Sabha and suggested that opposition parties jointly work out seat adjustments at the state level on the understanding that they will form a coalition on the basis of a common minimum programme. In the only, indirect, reference to the Lok Dal, Advani said: "If some opposition parties are inclined to spend all their energy and effort towards the politics of aggregation it is their concern. We hold that the politics of aggregation (forming a single unit), while it can create an electoral platform, cannot yield a proper party."

Nevertheless, many BJP delegates urged that even if the soft option of a common election platform was adopted, some minimum guidelines for alliances should first be framed. Delegate from Bihar, Durga Prasad Nathani, said the BJP should go alone at least in states where it was strong. This was echoed by a delegate from Tamil Nadu, Sarojini Muthanna. "I don't agree with the policy of coalition," she said. "It is like a child being forced to play in the company of bad children." Quipped Vajpayee: "If only bad boys are available what should we do?" His comment, however, reflected the opinion of several delegates who were upset that regular BJP baiters like Subramaniam Swamy, Raj Narain and H.N. Bahuguna, could become part of the coalition.

GOPAL SHETTY/F P J



Guest speaker Lt-General Sinha addressing the convention

While none of the proposed amendments to the election strategy was accepted, Vajpayee was unanimously empowered to consider the response of the other parties and then give final shape to the BJP strategy—the sole objector was hardline MP from Madhya Pradesh N.K. Shejwalker. BJP leaders saw little benefit in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and the southern states forming an alliance with the Lok Dal, but the desire to cash in on Charan Singh's caste-based clout in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana was the reason for the partnership, despite the Chowdhury's unreliability. The party strategy forming is to fight around 160 to 180 seats all over India, of which it hopes to win about 90. But Lok Dal leaders had made it clear that they wanted almost all the 85 seats in Uttar Pradesh for themselves. Still, as Rajindra Puri, a member of the BJP national executive, said: "We know where we stand, so adjustment is no problem."

Inconvenient questions like who could lead the opposition coalition were passed up with the excuse that after the elections, the matter would be decided democratically. Vajpayee sought to make it clear that he was not interested in being leader, that he would rather be some kind of referee. Surprisingly, he will not be contesting from his New Delhi constituency. This time round, he is expected to move to Madhya Pradesh.

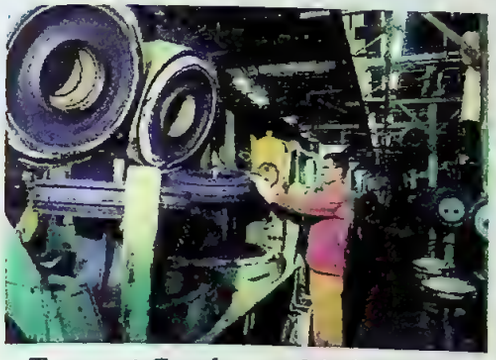
In its resolution on Punjab, the BJP only pussyfooted, taking a stand neither for nor against the continued army presence in that state for fear of alienating its Hindu supporters there. The inevitable RSS-BJP connection controversy surfaced once more in the wake of RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras' Vijayadashmi address calling for the support of only those parties that promised to protect Hindu interests. Even though this was seen as a ploy to make both the BJP and the Congress(I) aware of the fact that the Hindu vote could not be taken for granted, the statement seemed to have sufficiently rattled the leadership.

With the Congress(I) making inroads into its traditional Hindu vote banks in the Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir assembly elections, and with Hindu Punjabis backing the Government's action in Punjab, Advani was quick to refute any interpretation of Deoras' speech as a plug for the the Congress(I). Obviously he had in mind the statement made by RSS General Secretary Rajinder Singh in the pro-BJP RSS weekly the *Organiser*: "What has the Congress(I) done to deserve our support and what has the BJP done to lose it?" Deoras himself subsequently ended the controversy in a speech at Delhi which criticised the minority policy of the ruling party.

In an attempt to reassure the BJP rank and file that the party was not in danger of losing its individuality, Advani stressed the fact that the BJP and the CPI(M) were the only cadre-based organisations with distinct identities and ideologies. And despite various setbacks, the BJP can now boast of a deeper penetration in a number of central and southern states. As Vajpayee observed: "No longer can we be called a northern Indian or urban party. We are now truly a national party." But how effective a national party it is only the ensuing polls will tell.

—COOMI KAPOOR in Pune

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By Kishore Bajaj, Bada Saab, Bombay.

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The vest could be brocaded. With paisley designs, or polka dots, or just plain lustred satin. Colours — Golden Brown, Maroon, Flame-Red, Turquoise Blue.

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Trouser: Classic Black, with a strip of satin (Braid) on the outer seam of the trouser leg.

The Vest: Normally deeply cut and with one or three buttons.

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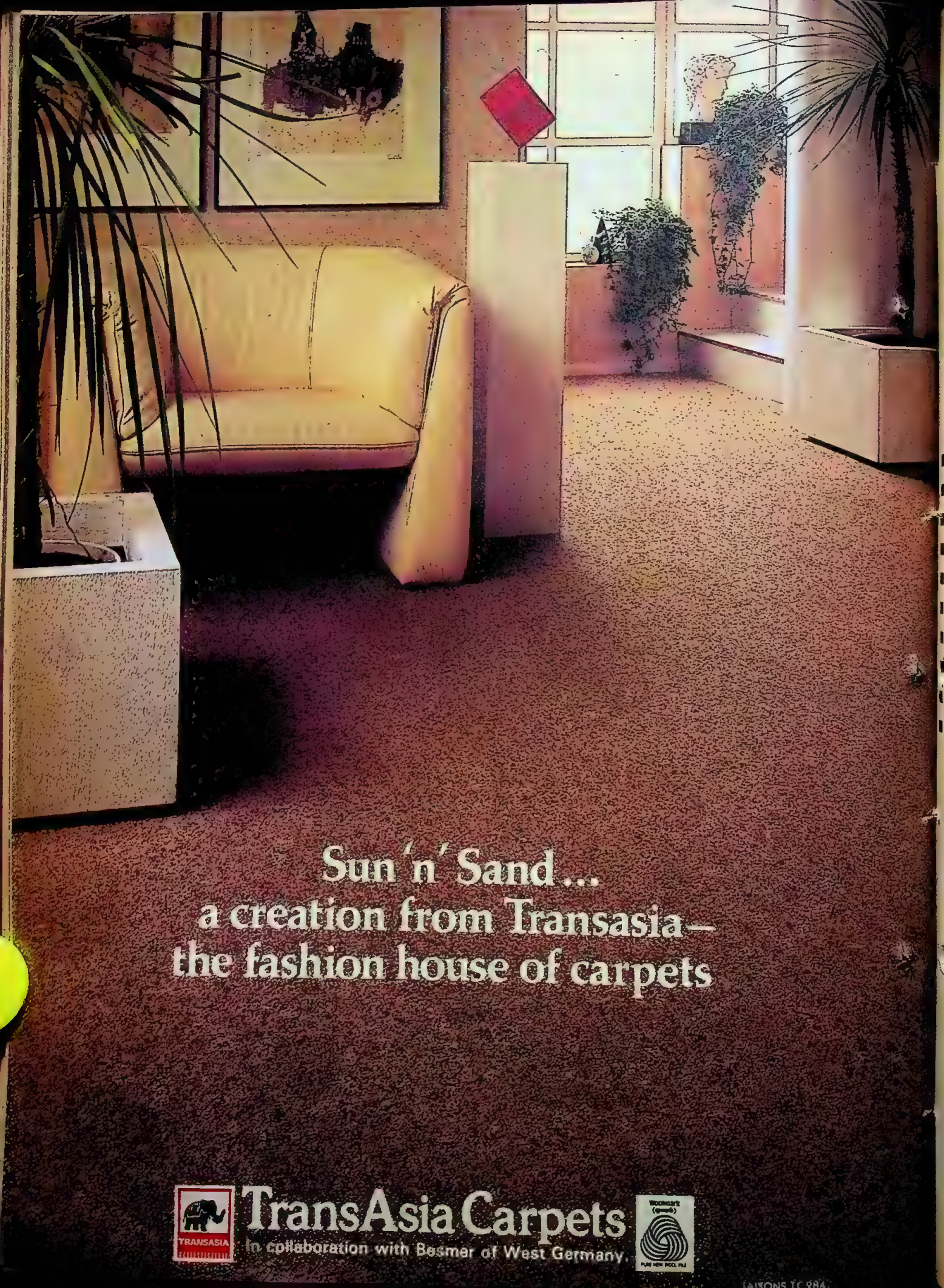
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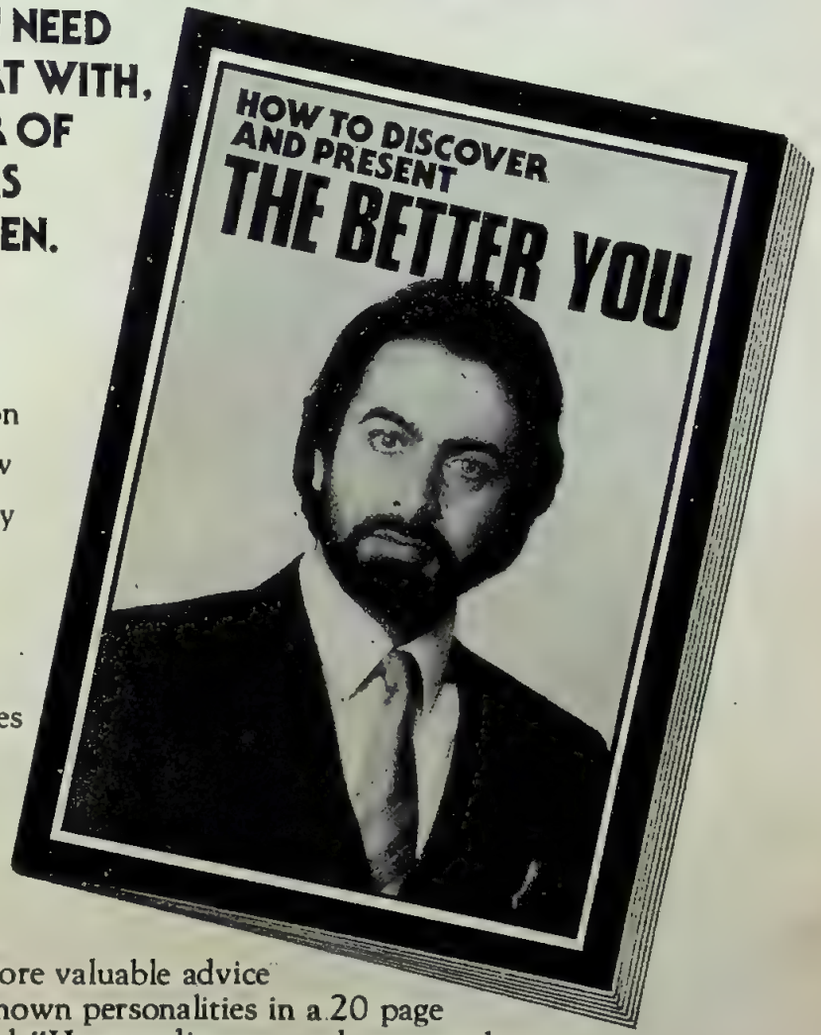
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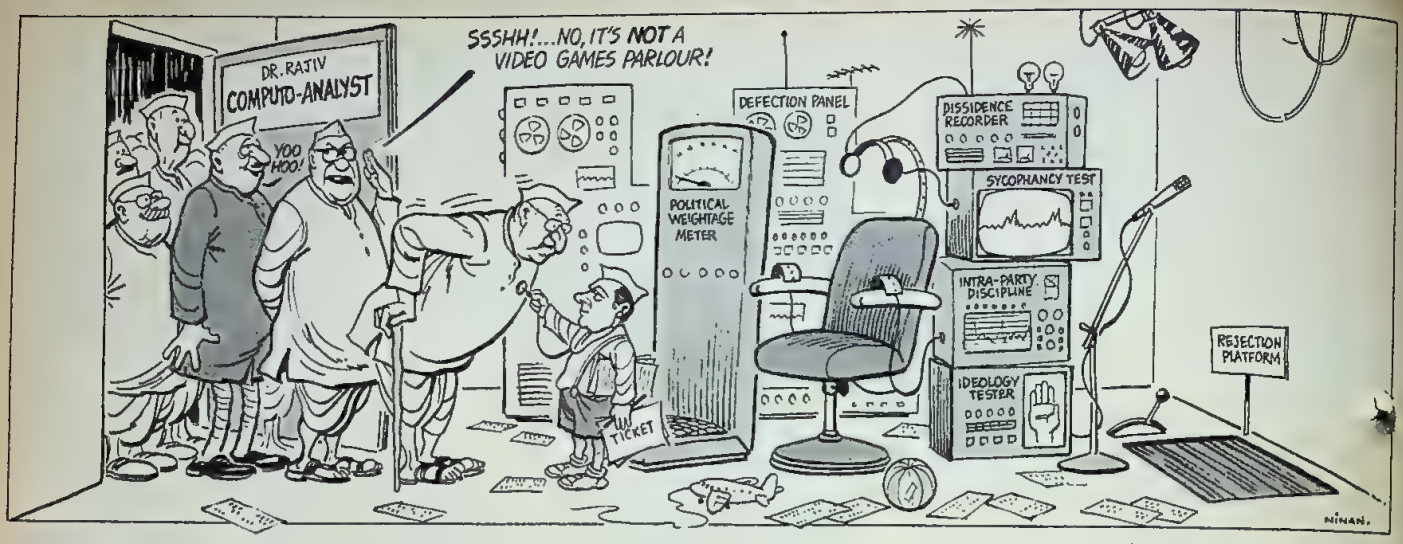
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CONGRESS(I)

Questions of Loyalty

THE ELECTION drums are yet to roll, but nobody in the Congress(I) has been left in any doubt that the prime selector of the party's 500-odd candidates for the impending Lok Sabha elections has been selected. For those who still harboured illusions about candidates being generally repeated, or local pressure groups clinching nominations independent of any central authority, the recent undeclared pitchforking of Rajiv Gandhi, the most powerful general secretary of the All India Congress (I) Committee (AICC-I) virtually at the top of the party's election machinery served as an eye-opener. As a veteran Congressman quipped: "Come elections, and the Congress (I) tickets will be distributed from one counter, marked 'Mr Rajiv Gandhi'."

The AICC(I) headquarters on New Delhi's Akbar Road never witnessed a busier fortnight, its 20-odd secretarial staff slogging 14 hours a day throughout the Diwali week to process replies furnished by 462 senior Congressmen to queries by their 39-year-old ex-pilot boss. The six other general secretaries only lent helping hands to him in the elaborate 'interview' session. But they were merely the turnstile through which interviewees entered the heavily guarded sanctum of Rajiv and faced him for a rigorous test of loyalty, sincerity and competence. It was a system of double-check—almost unknown in political parties—for the huge mass of information that Rajiv's busy secretariat at 2A, Motilal Nehru Marg, has already compiled on future Congress(I) candidates.

"It is surely not an election exercise," said the smooth-tongued Chandulal Chandrakar, AICC(I) general secretary, about the interview session. But, armed with the 462 files that have already been opened on the basis of the replies, Rajiv embarked on an extensive tour programme, covering Assam, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal in the span of a fortnight, and conferring with the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) leaders at every stage. Leaving nothing to chance, he cross-checked all available information to spot loyal and reliable people.

The manner in which the interviews were held at the AICC(I) office and are still being held in some form or the other at the PCC-I level is significant in itself. Fourteen of the 17 Congress(I) chief ministers, 21 PCC(I) presidents, over 200 PCC(I) office-bearers, important ex-chief ministers and weighty Congressmen who had joined the party after 1980 were all summoned to the AICC(I) office for five days from October 10 through October 14. No exception was made for age or seniority: even the octogenarian 'working president' of the AICC(I), Kamalapati Tripathi, who incidentally doesn't have a room to call his own at the AICC(I) headquarters, figured in the list of interviewees. Others who had to goose-step into the chamber of Rajiv were veteran leaders like Y.B. Chavan, Ashoke Sen, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari, former Maharashtra chief ministers A.R. Antulay and Babasaheb Bhosale, former Andhra Pradesh chief minister T. Anjiah, former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra, Madhya Pradesh Congress(I) leader Vidya Charan Shukla and Gundu Rao, former chief minister of Karnataka.

The questionnaire, reportedly phrased by Rajiv in consultation with his inner coterie of friends, was strictly meant for the first phase of the "interview" with the other AICC(I) general secretaries while Rajiv himself quizzed his partymen on the specifics. Sample questions:

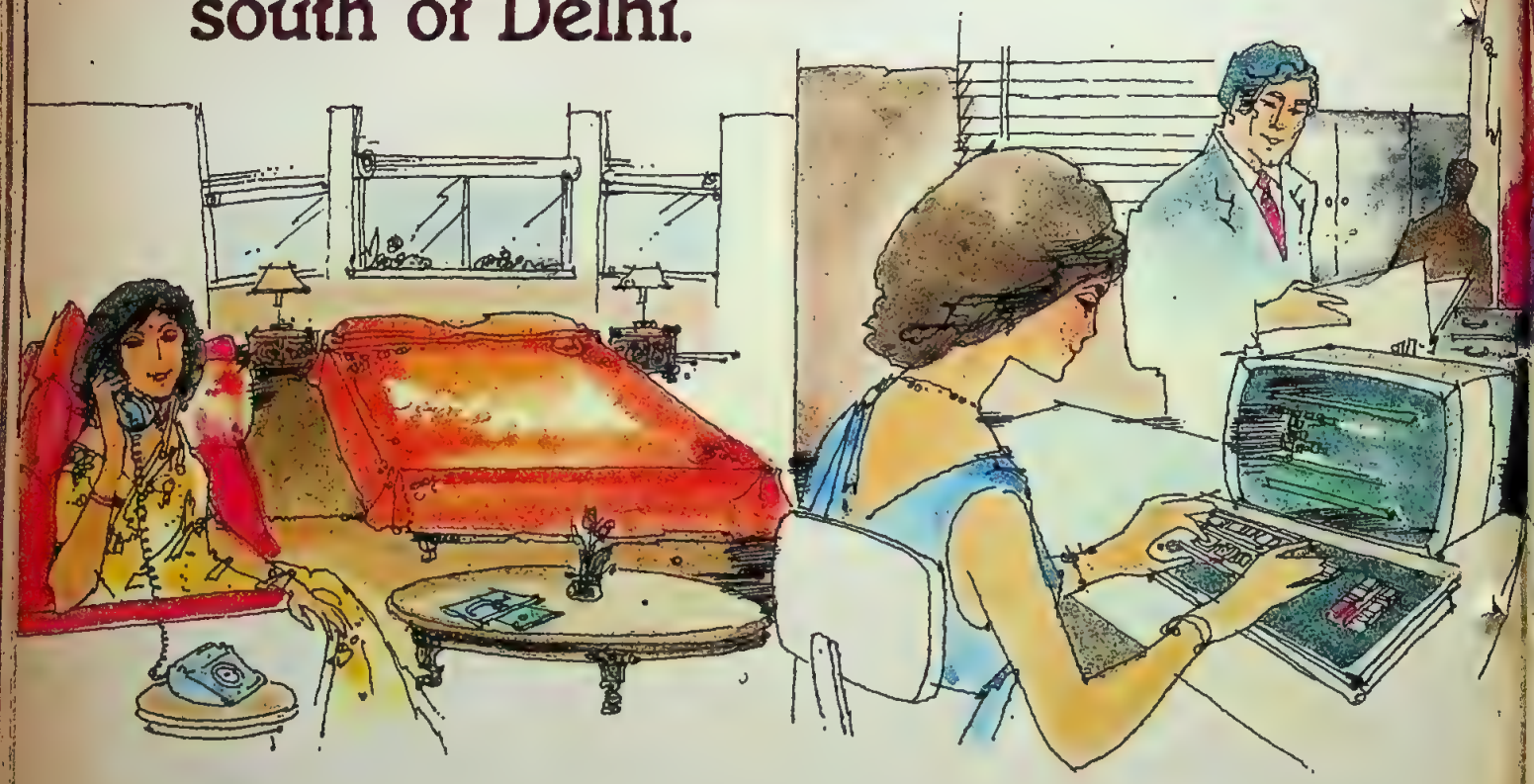
- What are the attitudes of the minorities and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes towards the Congress(I) in your state?
- What is your estimate of the strength of the other political parties in your area?
- Is there any effective election machinery in existence at the level of your PCC(I)?
- Do you think the Opposition will put up united candidates in your state?
- What are the major achievements of the state Government that you'd like to have emphasised in the campaign?

According to many who had participated in the exercise, the questionnaire was merely a warming-up device, to be followed by interviews with Rajiv where he dropped the broad generalities. "Should we take Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav or not," was his first question to a Bihar leader, a Brahmin not very kindly disposed towards the 'backward' Yadav caste to which Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav belongs. But he was aware of the move to induct Yadav, which materialised within a week of the interview, and swallowing his pride, he replied: "Why not? He's a good choice."

Similarly, to a West Bengal MLA, who, as minister in the cabinet of Siddhartha Shankar Ray (1972-77) had been humiliated by him, Rajiv's pointed query was whether Ray should be admitted into the party. The MLA too knew that the decision to induct Ray was under serious consideration, so he nodded in consent though his heart must have bled. There were some anxious moments when a former Andhra

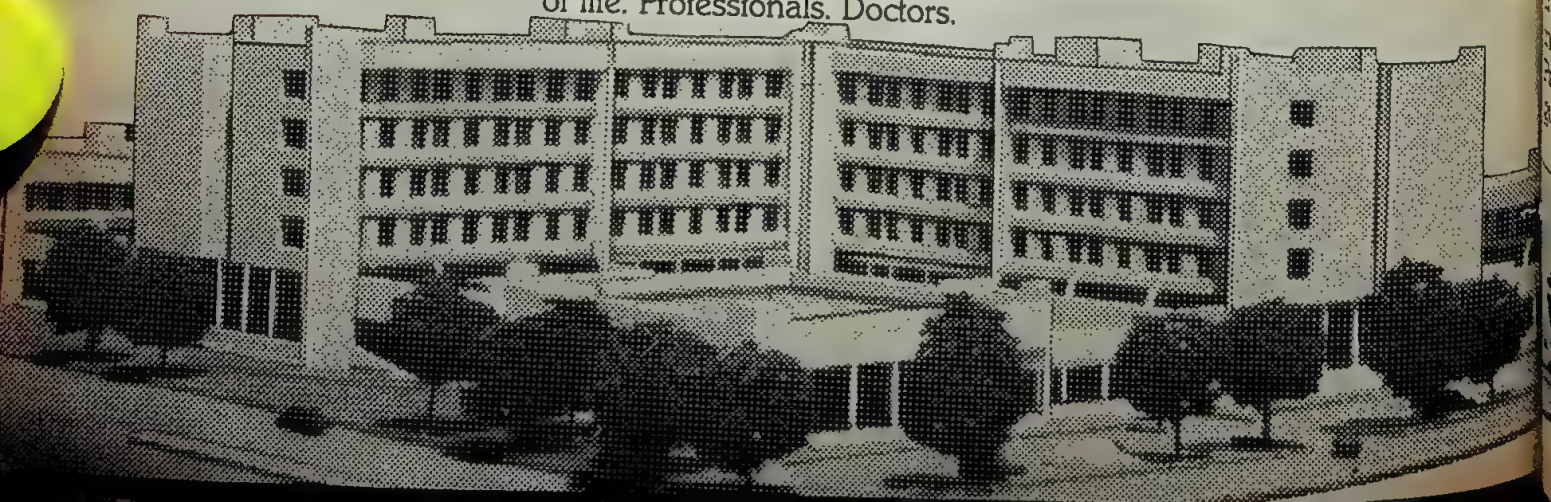

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Pradesh chief minister was asked how many seats the party could expect to win in the state. But the man still had enough gumption to speculate that Rajiv's own reading of the Andhra situation might not be particularly optimistic, and, rather than upsetting him with a pleasant lie, he replied that the tally might well be nil. To his relief, Rajiv smiled at him and said: "I appreciate your candour."

As a pre-election exercise, the interviews provided Rajiv with the yardstick to go about the business of nominating candidates. His last year's plan to gather information regarding the political scene through a team of youth coordinators was not particularly successful. Thereafter, his secretariat began collecting information on its own on the state of the party and the political ambience. For example, the entire strategy of wooing Satyendra Narain Sinha, a prominent Rajput leader of Bihar, and Yadav, the 'backward' leader, was suggested by his secretariat without consulting the Bihar unit of the party. He talked directly to them so that his decisions wouldn't be resented.

Curiously, a similar interview was carried out in the Congress on the eve of the 1962 polls when Pandit Nehru was lying ill and the nation was being dogged by the question: after Nehru, who? At that time, it was Mrs Gandhi, holding no post in the party, who together with Lal Bahadur Shastri, conducted the interviews. It did yield results in the sense that the 1962-67 Lok Sabha first saw the rise of a generation of Congress MP's personally loyal to the Nehru-Gandhi family. When the crunch came in 1966, and the Congress members had to decide who should be the prime minister—Morarji Desai or Mrs Gandhi—they voted for Mrs Gandhi.

At the hustings, Rajiv has to pass two tests, not one. He has to make his party win, which, given its eroded popularity in the south and no major gain in the northern states, may be an uphill task. But it will be still more difficult for him to ensure that the Congress (I) MP's who take their seats in India's eighth Lok Sabha remain personally loyal to him and his mother and not to any local chieftains.

—SUMIT MITRA

LOK SABHA POLL

Alternatives

CAN THE Congress(I) postpone the elections to the Lok Sabha, due latest by January 20, 1985, if it does not suit its interest to hold it now? According to Article 83(2) of the Constitution, "the House of the People, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer and the expiration of the said period of five years shall operate as a dissolution of the House". The period of five years since the first session of the existing seventh Lok Sabha commenced expires on January 19, 1985. But can the ruling party extend the Lok Sabha's life beyond this period? Yes, by a constitutional amendment which is well within its capability.

Opinions of constitutional experts cutting across political parties converge on one point: if Mrs Gandhi desires, she can convene a brief session of the Parliament and get the Article 83(2) amended to change the phrase "for five years" into "six years", or, as lawyer Soli Sorabjee said, "fifty years, if she likes". The standard procedure for bringing about an amendment to the Constitution, which is laid down in Article 368, clearly states that any such amendment becomes valid if over a half of the members of each House present (provided that not less than two-thirds of members of that House are present and voting) accept it. The Congress(I) has a strength of 346 in the 542-member Lok Sabha and is just eight short of a two-thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha—which means Mrs Gandhi will find it a cakewalk if she so intends.

She did the same thing with impunity in 1976 when, by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, she saved the sixth Lok Sabha from going rump and gave it a fresh one year's lease of life. The nation was writhing under the Emergency at that time and no writ was filed against the amendment. It was left to the subsequent Janata government to undo the damage in 1978 when, by the 44th Amendment, the life span of the Lower House was again reduced to five years.

If Mrs Gandhi desires, she can convene a brief session of the Parliament to amend Article 83 and postpone the elections.

A brief winter session of the Parliament is fraught with an additional significance. Article 85 of the Constitution says that "six months shall not intervene" between the end of one session and the beginning of another. However it remains silent on whether the two sessions referred to are of the same Lok Sabha or of a successive Lok Sabha. In end-1979, Raj Narain had in fact pleaded with Charan Singh, the stop-gap prime minister, to postpone the January 1980 polls on this ground though Singh did not heed it. Thus, if a session is held towards the end of November, the Centre can argue that the first session of the new Lok Sabha need not be held till late May next year. A legal luminary, who is also a Congress(I) MP, described it as a "clumsy option" because not holding the elections, according to him, "does not save the seventh Lok Sabha from going rump". He says this will create a "legislative vacuum" for which there is no provision in the Constitution and an eventuality like this "goes against the grain of the Constitution" and is "eminently challengeable".

Buta Singh, Union minister for parliamentary affairs, firmly denies knowledge of any move to convene a short session of the Parliament before the elections, though a section of Congress(I) MP's was stridently talking last fortnight of "strong and tangible threats from across the border" requiring an "urgent session of the Parliament".

To postpone the polls, all that the ruling party requires is the holding of a session of both Houses of the Parliament. Amendment to Article 83 does not call for ratification by the state assemblies, so the verdict of the majority members of two Houses of the Parliament will be sufficient to enable the Congress(I) to hold on to power—technically—for as many more years as it pleases. Said Satish Agarwal, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP: "There can be excuses galore—war clouds, integrity of the country, and what have you."

An amendment to the Article 83 can surely be challenged in a court of law on the ground that it infringes upon the basic structure of the Constitution. But even a legal expert opposed to the Congress(I) like Sorabjee agrees that, "it is doubtful if such an amendment can be stopped". A leading Supreme Court lawyer close to Mrs Gandhi says: "To stop the elections is theoretically possible, but I don't believe Mrs Gandhi will ever take recourse to such desperate remedies."

—SUMIT MITRA

MUSHTAQ AHMED



Hegde and his wife given a fond farewell by party members: mass support

KARNATAKA

An Untimely Problem



WHILE Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran was hovering between life and death, in neighbouring Karnataka Ramakrishna Hegde too was facing a grave threat to his health and a promising political career. A thickening of the right vocal chord, which, doctors suspect could be due to chronic laryngitis or, worse, cancer, had reduced Hegde's mellow voice to a reedy squeak. Just before he left, last fortnight, for the Boston Union Medical College in the United States for a highly precise operation using a laser beam to destroy the growth in his larynx, a calm Hegde told INDIA TODAY: "If my voice continues to be like this it will be a great handicap. I will not be able to reach the people which is absolutely vital for me. For a politician his voice is a capital asset." Asked how he took his illness, Hegde said: "I have taken it with the same calm as I would take any other bad news. I am never sure whether I will rise tomorrow and I do my day-to-day work with that assumption so that I will have left nothing undone when I finally go."

Hegde is not worried that the state administration will be affected because of his absence. "If my departure affects the whole thing, that means I have not built up the system well. The secret of successful leadership or captaincy is that the departure of the leader from the scene should not result in the system being paralysed."

But for the Janata Party in Karnataka, Hegde is its greatest asset, and if his untimely health problem is not solved, it will adversely affect its performance in the Lok Sabha elections. The Government has survived for almost two years primarily because of the chief minister's shrewd handling of the political situation. J.H. Patel, the newly-appointed secretary general of the state party unit admitted: "Hegde's presence cannot be substituted. He has turned out to be a lovable chief minister for the masses and if he cannot campaign, our chances will be seriously affected."

Fortunately for him, doctors opine that Hegde will be normal within a month of the operation. But Hegde was taking no chances. Last month he made a whirlwind tour of all the districts of Karnataka and drew large crowds everywhere. And just before leaving for the United States, he announced a series of sops for various sections of people. Among them:

- exemption to almost five lakh tenants from paying compensation to landlords with the state coughing up the Rs 99 crore in dues;
- formation of a minorities development corporation with an initial capital outlay of Rs 1 crore. In addition, Rs 25 lakh was sanctioned to repair mosques and district officials were ordered to clear applications for sites to build mosques and churches;
- a promise to build 12,000 houses at Rs 5,500 each for Scheduled Castes and Tribes and hostels in all the 19 districts for the students and employment in the state government for women graduates;
- agreement to sanction a capitation fee-based private medical college for the backward classes. This is the third such college being sanctioned despite the legislature passing a bill to ban capitation fees;
- distribution of drought relief worth Rs 50 crore in the form of seeds, fertilisers, fodder and wages to disgruntled farmers and labourers. In a memorandum to the Centre, the Janata Government

asked for Rs 209 crore more to tide over the drought situation in the state.

Irked by the flurry of schemes, the rotund state Congress(I) chief K.H. Patil remarked sarcastically: "At the rate Hegde is spending, the state will go bankrupt—if it hasn't already."

The sops were obviously aimed at winning public sympathy at a time when as many as 8 of the 20 district party units of the Janata Party were in a shambles with intense rivalry breaking out among the rank and file. It took all the patience and tact of state party chief H.D. Deve Gowda and secretary-general Patel, who toured the districts last fortnight, to bring about a semblance of unity. Said Patel: "Our plan is to be ready organisationally by November 15 so that we can decide on which candidates to project and be ready for the battle by the first week of December."

But these preparations have been hampered by the drought which ravaged 16 of the 19 districts in Karnataka. About six lakh farmers have been hit by the destruction of 50 per cent of ragi, groundnut, jowar and paddy sown in the area. The loss in terms of production is about 2 million tonnes of grain worth Rs 1.4 crore. Besides, 44 lakh labourers have been put out of work.

The Government immediately launched a drought relief programme by distributing free seeds, fertilisers, digging bore wells for drinking water supply, advancing loans of farmers and providing employment to displaced labourers. So far it has spent Rs 50 crore, including Rs 10 crore given by the Centre, but to bring total relief the state estimates that it needs another Rs 209 crore from the Centre. The Government came in for some carping criticism from the Opposition which accused it of squandering money.

UNEXPECTEDLY the Janata Party faced a major setback when the Karnataka Ryota Sangha, the most vocal of the farmers' associations in the state, decided to join the poll fray by putting up its own candidates. In the Assembly elections last year it was the massive backing of the farmers that helped the Janata come to power. But despite the Government waiving interest on cooperative loans to the extent of Rs 36 crore, the Sangha is disillusioned. It is still unhappy about the low crop prices and soaring costs of production and in early October held a massive rally in Bangalore where it announced its decision to contest the forthcoming general elections.

T.L. Nanjundaswamy, the bearded convenor of the Sangha, explains, "Farmers have realised that all political parties have become irrelevant. They are insensitive to people's problems. That is why we are trying to create a political alternative for the Karnataka electorate." The Sangha went about doing this systematically last fortnight. Village level voter councils were formed to appoint an electoral college in each constituency to choose candidates. According to the Sangha, the person selected must be non-political, free from corruption charges, and believing in secularism.

Although in public the Janata leaders make light of this development, the leadership is worried because the Sangha has a particularly powerful base in the districts of Shimoga, Hassan, Tumkur and Mandya—areas the Janata considers its strongholds. Hegde has so far been unable to pacify Sangha members. He irritated them further when, in an unsuccessful bid to drive a wedge in the farmers' movement, he propped up other such associations in the state. In a bid to mollify Sangha leaders, Patel last fortnight took pains to write a formal letter asking them not to create "an unfavourable atmosphere" for the Government.

Patel's concern is understandable. The coming elections are crucial for the Janata Government's survival because if it loses badly it will have to quit as did Urs' ruling Congress(U) after the Congress(I) trounced it in 1980. Right now, the Janata Party is banking on the powerful Vokkaligas and Lingayats to pull it through. In a bid to weaken the Congress(I)'s grip over the backward classes, minorities, and Scheduled Castes and Tribals, the party held a series of state-level conferences for these sections at which the sops were announced. But the Janata Government will have to do more than that to win over

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

Troubled Note

FOR A MAN who was quite frankly proud of the rich timbre of his voice, the news that he could be suffering from chronic laryngitis or early cancerous malignancy, must have come as a bad blow to Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde.

It began in March when Hegde found his voice inexplicably sinking and he started experiencing acute pain in the throat. Doctors put him on a course of antibiotics and advised him to stop smoking. But with no signs of his throat healing Hegde then consulted doctors at the Jaslok Hospital in Bombay when he was in Maharashtra in May for talks with Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil. On examination, doctors discovered a tiny white patch on the right vocal chord. Immediately, it was surgically removed and Hegde was sent home with



Hegde: vocal problem

instructions to renounce his daily Dunhills and to give up speaking for a month.

The first piece of advice could be followed, with some difficulty. But the second, for a chief minister, was virtually impossible to abide by. As if to compensate, Hegde started observing Sunday silences, but the pressure of work was far too great and the strain began to tell. Early October, his throat started "behaving funnily" once more. Another visit to Jaslok revealed a slight thickening of the right vocal chord where the white patch had been.

The doctor decided not to take any chances. They advised Hegde to go to the Boston Union Medical College in the United States for laser beam surgery by the renowned Dr Steward Strong. The operation involves the directing of a beam on the growth to prevent it from spreading further. Once this is done, Hegde's voice should be back with him within a month—timbre et al. But the success of the operation can only be confirmed a few months later if there is no further growth on the vocal chord. At 57, Hegde's general health is good, apart from the occasional bronchial attacks. His blood pressure is normal and he is not diabetic. If his throat heals well, Hegde should not only be able to campaign in earnest for the Lok Sabha elections, he should be able to re-enter the national arena.

MUSHTAQ AHMED



Nanjundaswamy addressing a rally in Bangalore: new factor

these sections which, at the moment, are still not convinced of his sincerity.

The party has also been trying to reach an electoral understanding with "friendly parties", such as the BJP and the two communist parties that prop up Hegde's minority government. Early in October it held a round of talks with the BJP which was inconclusive because in the face of the latter's demand for 11 seats out of 28 in the state, the Janata was likely to concede at the most only four to the BJP, one to the communist parties, and one to the Congress(S) which is likely to support them in Maharashtra, keeping the remaining for itself. Says a confident Patel: "As of today, we will win at least 16 out of the 28."

THE BJP, whose 18 MLA's help the Janata Government have a clear majority in the Assembly, feels that this would be possible only if the Janata is able to reach an understanding with the other opposition parties in the state. The BJP's chubby president B.B. Shivappa warns: "If there is a triangular contest the Congress(I) is sure to win. We must fight as one." The party's main grouse is that the Government is moving "too slowly" and that corruption is rampant at all levels. Despite the lack of opposition unity at the national level, Hegde is optimistic about the party's election prospects. Said the chief minister: "The situation in the south is totally different from the north, we will come to an understanding here. I think the people in this election will vote their own way despite opposition unity moves. It is going to be a protest vote against the Congress(I)."

The BJP's charge that the Government is moving slowly holds good because with the air of political uncertainty constantly hanging over the state, the administration is unwilling to move quickly. But fortunately for the Janata Government the Congress(I) is so disorganised that it has so far not acted as a tough opposition. The Andhra Pradesh blunder has not only dissuaded the Congress(I) from attempting a similar toppling move, the Janata Party's chances have been bolstered in border districts such as Raichur, Kolar, Bellary, and Gulbarga, where a large Telugu-speaking population resides. To Hegde's delight, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao who paid him a visit in Bangalore last fortnight, announced that he would campaign for the Janata Party in these districts. Said he: "I am ever willing to help my brother Hegde and the people of Karnataka."

For the state unit of the Congress(I), this is bad news as they have always considered these districts their strongholds. Apart from this, the party is split into groups that are unwilling to compromise. Gundu Rao, who is likely to contest the elections, has declared that he is "neutral". With Hegde appointing a one-man commission last fortnight to probe into the charges levelled by MLA Byre Gowda accusing Veerappa Moily of trying to buy him over to the party for two lakh rupees and producing a recorded version of the conversation, the Congress(I) leader of the Opposition in the Assembly finds his political career once again jeopardised. H.C. Srikantaiah, who heads the most vocal dissident group, has been asking the high command to change both Moily and Patil because he feels that they are not effective. But the high command is in no mood for changes at this stage because it could adversely affect the party's election prospects.

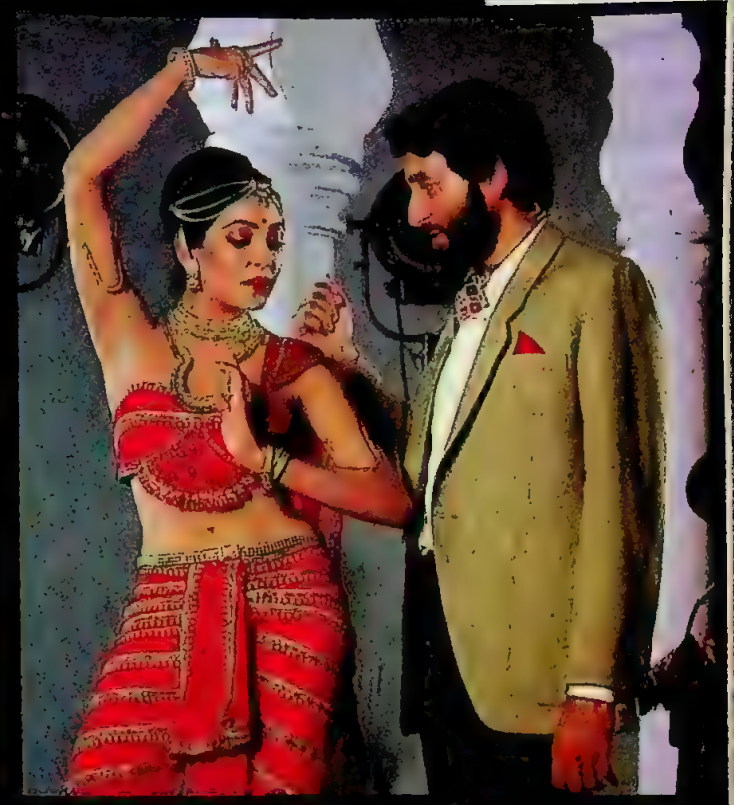
Adding to the uncertain political situation in the state, Hegde has of late been vocal about his desire to pull out of state politics. Commenting on rumours that he was keen on moving to the national scene, Hegde said: "I didn't want to come back to state politics in the first place. I came back because I was asked to by the party. But I can't continue in state politics for ever. I have the feeling that I have fulfilled my role here and I don't want to continue. But if I leave immediately, it would inject an element of uncertainty."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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WEST BENGAL

The Factional Fracas



IF THERE is any state in the country where the Congress(I) can say with some certainty that it will improve its position in the coming Lok Sabha elections, it is West Bengal. In 1980 the party won four seats here, and this time the general consensus is that it should at least double that figure. But that bright prospect has not brought any unity of purpose in its wake. Factionalism in the party today is more rampant than ever before. This was highlighted last fortnight by the statement of a group professing allegiance to Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, that it would not automatically accept candidates nominated by the Congress(I) high command to contest the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

This show of defiance is the latest development in a long-running feud between the factions of the two Union ministers from the state: Mukherjee and Minister for Railways, Ghani Khan Chowdhury. The Mukherjee group is "particularly keen", says one of its members, "to ensure that Chowdhury does not succeed in getting a major portion of the nominations for his own men". That message was repeated to the high command's representative and All India Congress Committee (AICC-I) General Secretary Rajendra Kumari Bajpai by the chief whip of the party in the state Assembly, Subrata Mukherjee.

Opposition to the railways minister has grown because of his attempts to play a major role in the nomination of candidates. His announcement that the Congress(I) would never support the independent candidature of former chief minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray for the Darjeeling seat, and his alleged efforts to finalise Rajiv Gandhi's tour programme in the state on his own, keeping the WBPCC(I) out of the picture, have only added grist to the Pranab camp's mill.

Regarding Ray's candidature, the group led by Subrata Mukherjee wonders how the minister for railways could say on his own that the party would not support him when the whole issue of nominations is to be settled by the high command. Mukherjee told INDIA TODAY: "For quite some time now Ray has made it known to the high command that he wishes to return to the party. When others are being taken in so liberally, why should he be kept out?" His contention is that if the Congress(I) is to pose an effective challenge to the CPI(M) at the hustings then it "must have a leader like Ray who alone can match the charisma of Jyoti Basu. And that is very important in West Bengal where voters often vote for a party whose leader they like. Unfortunately right now we have no leader who can stand up to Basu's personality".



Mukherjee



Chowdhury

Most state leaders of the party seem to be behind the finance minister, and it appears that he enjoys a clear edge over the railways minister within the party organisation.

Ray himself has not been too bothered by Chowdhury's tirades against him or by the latter's announcement that he would set up a youth leader of the hills, Dawa Norbula, to contest the Darjeeling seat. Last fortnight his men were working overtime plastering almost every wall in Siliguri with the words: "Site reserved for S.S. Ray 1984-85". Though a few Congress(I) leaders in Darjeeling district were against nominating Ray—they preferred a local man to fight incumbent CPI(M) MP Ananada Pathak—they would not hesitate to support Ray if the high command took him into the party or decided to support him as an independent.

Most state leaders of the party seem to be behind the finance minister, and it appears that Mukherjee enjoys a clear edge over the railways minister within the party organisation. With the election prospects for his party appearing the most favourable since 1977, Mukherjee has expressed a willingness to contest a Lok Sabha seat from the state. If he emerges victorious he would have erased the stigma of never having won an election.

Mukherjee hails from West Bengal's Birbhum district, but neither he nor his supporters are keen on fighting from there as it is a Marxist stronghold. Thus, despite covert opposition from Chowdhury, efforts are on to get him to contest from one of the three Calcutta seats or from Raiganj in north Bengal which the party won in the last elections. In Calcutta the Congress(I) won only one seat in 1980, but if the trend in the recent Assembly by-elections is anything to go by, the middle class is more likely to vote for the Congress(I)'s symbol of the hand rather than the Marxists' hammer and sickle.

The two ministers, meanwhile, have been touring the state and addressing rallies in what are in effect election campaigns. Chowdhury, MP from Malda, has generally confined himself to north Bengal, and Mukherjee has usually stayed south of the Bhagirathi. The lack of unity between the two has percolated so deep that even with elections round the corner, the WBPCC(I) headquarters continues to bear a desolate look, with senior leaders all working from their own homes. Obviously Rajiv Gandhi's pep talk to his partymen last fortnight asking for unity does not seem to have had much effect.

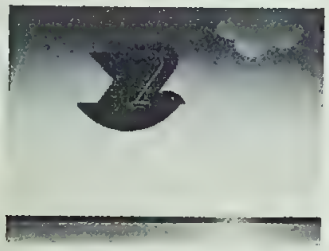
However, with the bigger issue of nominations still hanging fire neither side was sure that it would be settled in a manner satisfying to both. Both camps appeared resigned to making frequent trips to Delhi to put their points of view across. Said one party member: "We will fare much better if the high command listens to us and does not impose itself on us." But with each faction urging the high command to listen to it alone, Delhi has little choice but to act as it thinks best, steering clear as much as possible of both sides and in the process annoying both.

Resigned as most of them are to continued infighting, Congressmen in the state seek solace in the oft-repeated argument that since unlike the Marxists', theirs is not a regimented political party but a democratic organisation, expression of differences is natural. The lesson that at election time such differences can cost dearly clearly has yet to be learnt.

—SUMANTA SEN

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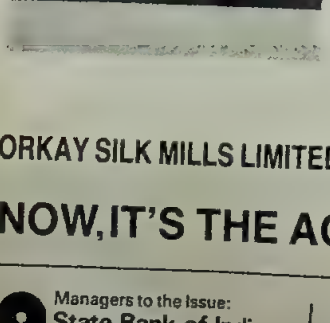
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MADHYA PRADESH

Man-eater of Mandu



MANDU, the picturesque plateau of 12,000 acres in Madhya Pradesh, is one of the prime tourist spots in the country. But the resort has turned into a killing ground over the last five months following the appearance of a man-eater that has already taken the lives of five young children.

The man-eater's latest target, Sigdar, a 10-year-old Bhil boy, survived to tell a hair-raising tale. For Sigdar, it was, literally, an escape from the jaws of death. He was on a visit to his relatives in Jamaniya village, a few kilometres from the Mandu resort. Around midnight on October 8, Sigdar was sleeping on the floor of the cottage, when he was shaken awake by teeth sinking into his neck. He screamed as the animal dragged him towards the door. Family members, however, reacted immediately and flashing their torches, frightened the man-eater, who dropped Sigdar and fled. Tolya Ram, Sigdar's cousin, and one of the few reliable eye-witnesses to the man-eater's killing spree in the Mandu area says: "It was a yellow animal with black round spots", that attacked Sigdar.

The man-eater's reign of terror began on May 12 in village Jhabri, at the eastern edge of the Mandu. Sardar and his family —wife and seven children—were sleeping in their cottage verandah. Stealthily, the man-eater struck carrying away Sitaram, a six-year-old child, whose screams faded into the darkness. The next morning, Sitaram's body was found with one hand and part of his chest eaten away.

A week later, the predator snapped up two-year-old Heeru sleeping atop her mother Savitri in one of the two rooms of their house. Most huts in the area have either no doors or merely flimsy ones made of thatch, which provide no security from predators. And on the night when Heeru was taken away, the door of the hut was ajar. Little of Heeru was found the next morning, save for her hair, a thread she wore round her neck and some teeth.

On a rainy night of July 5, in Nandalalpura village, at the edge of the plateau, Mor Singh, 12, the eldest of six children went off to sleep at his grandfather Maniya's hut. According to Maniya, he was woken at midnight by Mor Singh's screams. Says Maniya: "I am too old to run, so I shouted for help." Says Gopal, a neighbour: "We ran outside, but the visibility was so poor that we gave up." Mor Singh's body was found next day barely 150 yards away, with part of his cheek eaten.

Two days later, the man-eater claimed his fourth victim five-year-old Mukesh, at village Umariya, south of Nandalalpura. But, it was September 13 that marked the man-eater's last and most gory killing. Dhuli, 10, was out grazing cattle with her uncle Munna. At four in the afternoon, Dhuli lagged behind while rounding up cattle and Munna, after calling for her a few times, carried on home. And sure enough, she failed to return. A search party later found traces of blood and scraps of clothing. The next morning, they stumbled on a gruesome sight: Dhuli's head lay separated from her torso and was partly eaten away. A hand torn off and chewed lay nearby.

Children attacked by the predator: terrorised populace





MOHAN KUMAR

Understandably fear stalks the villages surrounding Mandu. Most hut dwellers have hastily constructed doors made of a patchwork of tin pieces: scanty protection against a powerful and determined killer. Even the Forest Department of the area has offered little protection to the hapless villagers. The animal was not declared man-eater until July 7, after three deaths in nearly two months. In their bid to capture the animal, on September 2 they trapped a panther in a cage, who in a rage injured himself and had to be shot. Eleven days later, Dhuli was killed, proving that the actual man-eater was still at large.

In defence of their tardy action, the Chief Conservator (Wildlife) N.K. Joshi said that the order declaring the man-eater could not be passed earlier, since there were no witnesses to indicate even the species to which it belonged. He denies any reluctance on the part of his wing to shoot the man-eater. Said he: "I am quite clear in my mind that a child's life is more important than a panther's."

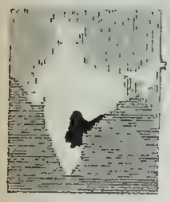
In spite of his assurances, the official's failure to trap or destroy the panther is worrying. The jungle in the area is neither extensive, nor is the population of panthers great. According to Joshi himself, there are probably just two panthers in the area and the man-eaters' area of operation does not exceed 5 km.

These facts make the issue intriguing. The answer may lie in the department's failure to commit greater resources and manpower. If a large-scale operation is launched, the odds against the man-eater can be increased considerably. Meanwhile, Mandu is far from being a tourists' paradise.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR
in Mandu

ANDHRA PRADESH

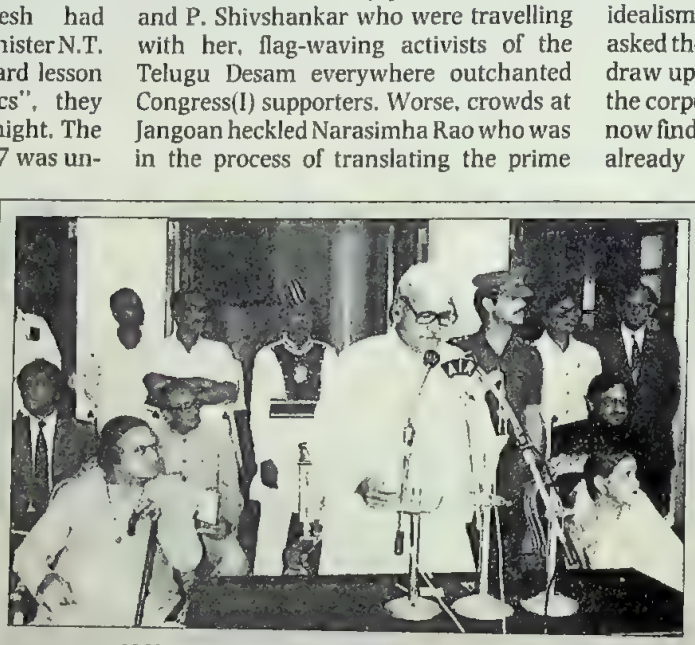
Shrewd Manoeuvres



IF THERE were any doubts about whether recent political events in Andhra Pradesh had taught Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao a hard lesson in "real politics", they were safely laid to rest last fortnight. The cabinet expansion on October 17 was undoubtedly aimed at placating the party MLA's. With the induction of six new ministers—which brings his ministry's strength to 16—NTR has the satisfaction of knowing that all major caste groups in the state have been represented. Thus in the Cabinet there are now three members each from the Kamma and Reddy communities, as well as from the scheduled castes and backward classes and one each from among the Brahmins, Kapus, Kshatriyas and religious minorities. And with the induction of K. Narayanaswami (irrigation), R. Rajagopala Reddy (transport), and the four ministers of state: Kolla Appalanaidu (endowments), G. Muddu Krishnamanaidu (education), D. Satyanarayana (excise), and N.A. Krishna (small industries), all but seven of the state's districts have been represented in the ministry. The next round of expansion can be expected to close this gap as well.

More significant is the prospect of the chief minister suggesting early polls to the state Assembly that completes just two years of its five-year term in January. Dissolution of the Assembly would be of great advantage to his wing of the Telugu Desam party, which has 145 MLA's in a 295-member house, with 22 others pledging support. With the pro-NTR euphoria whipped up by the aborted attempt to sideline the democratically-elected chief minister, early polls would effectively weed out many MLA's who deserted NTR in August.

The chief minister clearly has tremendous support in the state just now. Mrs Gandhi herself was witness to this when she went on a tour of the drought-hit districts of the state last fortnight. To the embarrassment of the Union Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao, K. Vijayabhaskar Reddy and P. Shivshankar who were travelling with her, flag-waving activists of the Telugu Desam everywhere outchanted Congress(I) supporters. Worse, crowds at Jangoan heckled Narasimha Rao who was in the process of translating the prime minister's speech into Telugu.



N.T. Rama Rao and Governor S.D. Sharma at the swearing-in ceremony

The cabinet expansion on October 17 was undoubtedly the wary attempt of a chief minister to placate his party MLA's.

A day after the tour during which the chief minister accompanied Mrs Gandhi, a confident NTR met his MLA's in district-wise groups. They authorised him to decide on the question of dissolving the Assembly—a tactical move on NTR's part, designed to pre-empt any floor-crossing in the event he recommends to the governor that the Assembly be dissolved. NTR even consulted experts of constitutional law like Nani Palkhiwala and Soli Sorabjee on the possible implications of a dissolution move. But later, speaking to newsmen he said: "I have not made up my mind," but he did not rule out the possibility either.

Meanwhile, the chief minister was bending over backwards to keep his men pleased. First, he restored all the MLA's removed by Bhaskara Rao from their offices as chairmen or directors of boards and public institutions. Next, the boards of corporations were made larger to accommodate more MLA's, although this was in direct violation of the Vizag Mahanadu decision to appoint just one man to one post. The Telugu Desam had ironically enough, at one time criticised the proliferation of corporations which it said had been a Congress(I) strategy to pander to its own legislators. In a fit of high-minded idealism, the Telugu Desam had even asked the State Public Enterprises Board to draw up a plan that would merge some of the corporations. But obviously, the party now finds such idealism too inconvenient: already as many as 72 MLA's have been "provided for".

The new NTR is not above touting a few pre-election sops, either. They are:

- a Rs 18 crore scheme to give doles of Rs 30 a month to five lakh agricultural workers above the age of 60;
- a Rs 1 crore scheme to help cycle-rickshaw pullers to buy rickshaws. The Government will subsidise 20 per cent of the cost, the rest being provided for as loans from commercial banks;
- the Government will make available a saree and a dhoti each to 98 lakh ration card-holders at about half the usual price on the occasion of the Andhra Pradesh formation day on November 1.

The NTR Government has appointed a three-judge team headed by former chief justice of India, V.R. Krishna Iyer, to go into the controversial decisions Bhaskara Rao took in exempting the Chiran Palace lands from urban ceiling laws, as well as those pertaining to distilleries and other issues (INDIA TODAY, October 30). Bhaskara Rao has "welcomed" the inquiry and in turn challenged NTR to open up his "sensitive files" relating to his Ramakrishna Cine Studios, his Nacharam and Gandipet ashrams and Bhuvaneswari Carbides and Vishnupriya Hotels, concerns in which NTR's son-in-law N. Chandrababu Naidu has substantial financial interests. The Bhaskara Rao group is planning a mass satyagraha on November 1 to "inform the people about NTR's misrule and fascist methods".

But recent political moves by the chief minister suggest that Bhaskara Rao and local Congress(I) antagonists may have to contend with a new NTR who is not only more popular but politically much shrewder as well.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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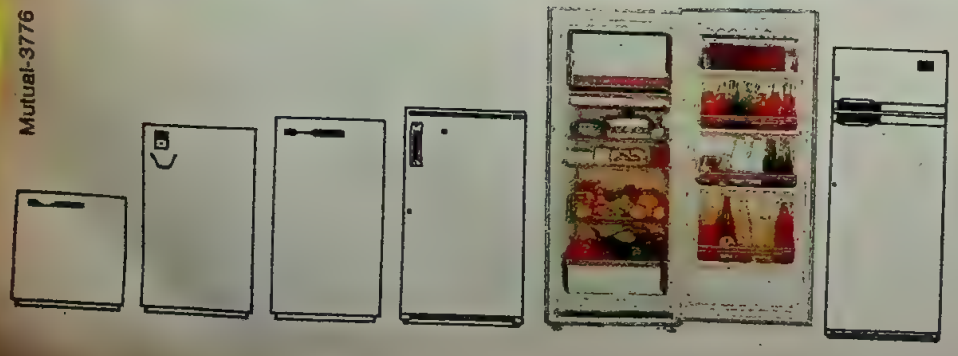
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PUNJAB

Operation Crackdown



THE PUNJAB police seems to have acquired a sudden sense of purpose. In the sub-mountainous region of Ropar district last fortnight, it claimed the capture of all but two of the 13 Sikh extremists responsible for breaching the Bhakra main canal twice—in June and July—disrupting irrigation and drinking water supply to large areas in Haryana and Punjab and damaging power installations. Of the remaining two, one is in the custody of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the other has reportedly fled to Dubai.

According to Ropar district police chief Mohamad Izhar Alam, the arrests were made close to the site of the first breach near the Chandigarh-Ropar national highway. Claiming that the encounter was injury-free, Alam gave a graphic description of the event: "Working on a prior clue that these extremists were collecting near the canal for another attempt, the police, well-armed and in adequate strength, waited in the thick wild bushes that surround the area. And, as dusk fell, on October 17, these people appeared in groups. We captured all after a brief exchange of fire." Ten of the extremists were caught carrying a .303 rifle and five pistols.

The official statement made in Chandi-

KAR SEWA

Labour of Love

AT LEAST for Amritsar, a city that has been the vortex of the Punjab storm for three long years, it was as if a breath of fresh air had suddenly wiped out the pollution of the past. For nine days, lakhs of singing devotees jostled each other in laughing camaraderie as the *kar sewa* of the Holy Sarovar (pool of nectar) proved conclusively that they neither harboured communal ill-will nor supported the extremist elements of their community.

The sense of peace and goodwill that prevailed was palpable as men, women and children from all over the country and many from abroad vied with each other to dredge the silt from the Sarovar under the leadership of the legendary Sikh saint, Baba Kharak Singh.

The most heartening sight was the presence of large numbers of Hindus, Muslims and national politicians like Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar, United Front Convenor Inder Kumar Gujral and Menaka Gandhi. In a minor accident, one person died and four others were injured but that hardly altered the sheer uninhibited joy on the faces of the participants. "We are washing the Holy Sarovar of all the sins that have been committed here," said Teja Singh, 50, a farmer from Patiala.

It was the fourth major *kar sewa* performed at the Golden Temple since it was founded in 1573 and the atmosphere was radically different from that performed at the Akal Takht by Nihang leader Santa Singh at the behest of the Central Government. In fact, during last fortnight's *kar sewa*, many voices were raised demanding that the rebuilt Akal Takht be demolished and reconstructed through voluntary work. The Sikh Sangat is to meet on Baisakhi day in April next to decide the issue but many Sikh leaders feel that the demolition is inevitable. "I will be the first one to pick up the axe and demolish it if the Sangat so desires," says Amarinder Singh, who quit the Lok Sabha and the Congress(I) to protest the army action.

The *kar sewa* also demonstrated that among the Sikh youth, militancy still reigns. The walls of the Golden Temple complex were splashed with pro-Khalistan and pro-Bhindranwale graffiti. But if the security forces and the Government were disturbed by the attempts to immortalise Bhindranwale, it was effectively diluted by the feeling that Amritsar, at least, had returned to some semblance of normalcy.



Devotees cleaning up the Holy Sarovar

garh the next day made the operation seem even simpler. All it said was "Acting quickly on information that some extremists had collected, police swooped down on them and arrested 10 persons. Interrogation confirmed that they were responsible for the canal cuts. The arrested persons—Surjeet Singh, Daljit Singh Dalee, Bittu, Trilochan Singh, Nirmal Singh, Gurmail Singh, Bant Singh, Man Singh, Gurdeep Singh and Balee—all confessed their crime saying they had instructions from the late president of the AISSF Bhai Amrik Singh to disturb the peace, cause economic loss and force the Government to concede the demands."

However, the process of tracking down and arresting the suspected extremists was neither as dramatic nor as smooth, as police in Ropar revealed later. It happened quite by chance. Arrested in Amritsar and —summoned from Nabha jail by the Ropar police for questioning on suspected involvement in the killing of a Nirankari, Bhupinder Singh spilled the beans about the involvement of Surjeet Singh, the first of the 11 to be arrested from his village 10 km from Ropar. This graduate and star hockey player admitted that he had masterminded the breaching of the canal.

As Alam recounts the incidents, the young extremists were full of derring-do. "It has been fixed into the minds of these youngsters, with nearly no criminal past otherwise, that they ought to act in a big way.. cut canals, disrupt electric installations or kill people. And they were a determined lot. A 16-year-old boy, Bittu, just out of school, proved to be the most active," he said. The first attempt to breach the canal was made on June 2, but the plan was not carried out because of the clash between the CRPF and Bhindranwale's men around the Golden Temple. On the night of June 5, even as the waters gushed into Budki rivulet, a railway bridge close by was dynamited.

Then followed days of questioning and humiliation for over 600 persons hailing from villages on either side of the canal and about 32 youngsters from Dulchi Majri village (INDIA TODAY, July 15) were made to suffer as they were held for four months in police camps. Says 70-year-old former Janata MLA Madho Singh: "It was an endless torture trail in our district and we had to carry truckloads of people to senior police officers in Patiala and Chandigarh to get those innocent people released."

According to the police version, the second breach was caused while police and army jeeps were patrolling the banks of the canal. With the aid of iron bars again, they made big holes in the bank, breaching it and the concrete aqueduct.

The people, however, are extremely critical of the police action and dismiss their explanations as mere theory. "The police wants to make up for having lost face and is booking innocent young men in false cases," said lawyer Santokh Singh Gill, in an obvious reference to the detention of the persons from Dulchi Majri. He holds that the second breach, at least, was due to natural causes. Jaswant Singh, 35, who claimed to have been present when the accused were produced before the Ropar Chief Judicial Magistrate Harjit Singh for remand by police, said many of them were limping following torture by the police. The police, for their part, do not deny this, but assert that the accused have confessed their crime. "If we could let off others when we found them innocent, there was no need to frame a case," said Alam firmly.

The arrests have come as a morale booster for the Ropar police, despite the general feeling of distrust among the people. Rocked by a spurt of extremist violence—there have been 18 cases of arson, sabotage and attempted killings in four months—the police have been kept under constant pressure. And until late last fortnight, they had made 61 arrests.

Elsewhere in Punjab, police claim to have arrested 23 persons, including four allegedly responsible for the September killing of eight Hindus in a bus near Batala. Their strategy appears to be to haul up as many sympathisers of the AISSF as possible. Of the 1,100 alleged terrorists on whom the state intelligence appears to have "solid" information, 53 were killed in the army action or during encounters and 600 have been arrested, leaving 400 still at large.

—GOBIND THUKRAL in Ropar

TRIPURA

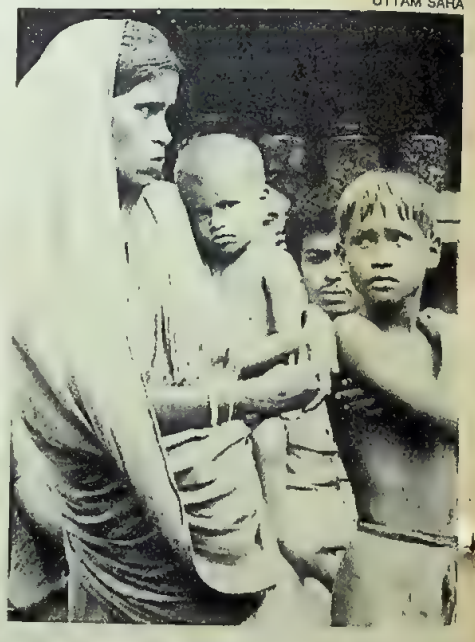
Fresh Flare-up



TWENTY-FOUR km west of Agartala, Muharramsardar Pura is one of the numerous villages that dot the Tripura countryside, with a mixed population of tribals and Bengalis. The village was silent on the night of October 15, until a rude knock on the door of Ajit Kamakar's house shattered its peace. The callers in the night were obviously bent on mayhem. Shouting slogans like TNV (Tripura National Volunteers) zindbad and "refugees government murdabad," they forced their way into the house and seriously wounded Kamakar's mother and grandmother with rifle butts.

When Kamakar's neighbours rushed out to see what the commotion was about they were fired upon, resulting in injuries to Nani Ghosh, one of the villagers. The raiders also set fire to the house of Tarak Das, the CPI(M) upa pradhan of the local panchayat. Similar attacks in other parts of west and north Tripura the next night left seven Bengalis dead, further exacerbating the panic that has gripped the state. Said a state government official in Agartala: "We are sitting on a volcano which may erupt at any moment."

UTTAM SAHA



Lalita, wife of firing victim Ghosh

Besides the toll in lives, the latest attacks also put paid to the Government claim that the TNV activists all resided in the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh and that they operated only along Tripura's border villages. Kamakar and his neighbours claim that one of the attackers was Manik Rupini, a tribal youth of Champabari village which is a mere five miles away from Muharramsardar pura. This was confirmation of earlier intelligence reports that the TNV had been successful in a recruitment drive within Tripura and planned to use the new recruits for terrorist acts deep in the state.

Soon after the attack on Muharramsardar Pura, the state Government arranged for a Central Reserve Police platoon to be posted in the village. But inquiries last fornight revealed that the platoon did not remain in the village after dusk, leaving the hapless villagers with no choice but to desert their homes at night and take shelter at the Champaknagar

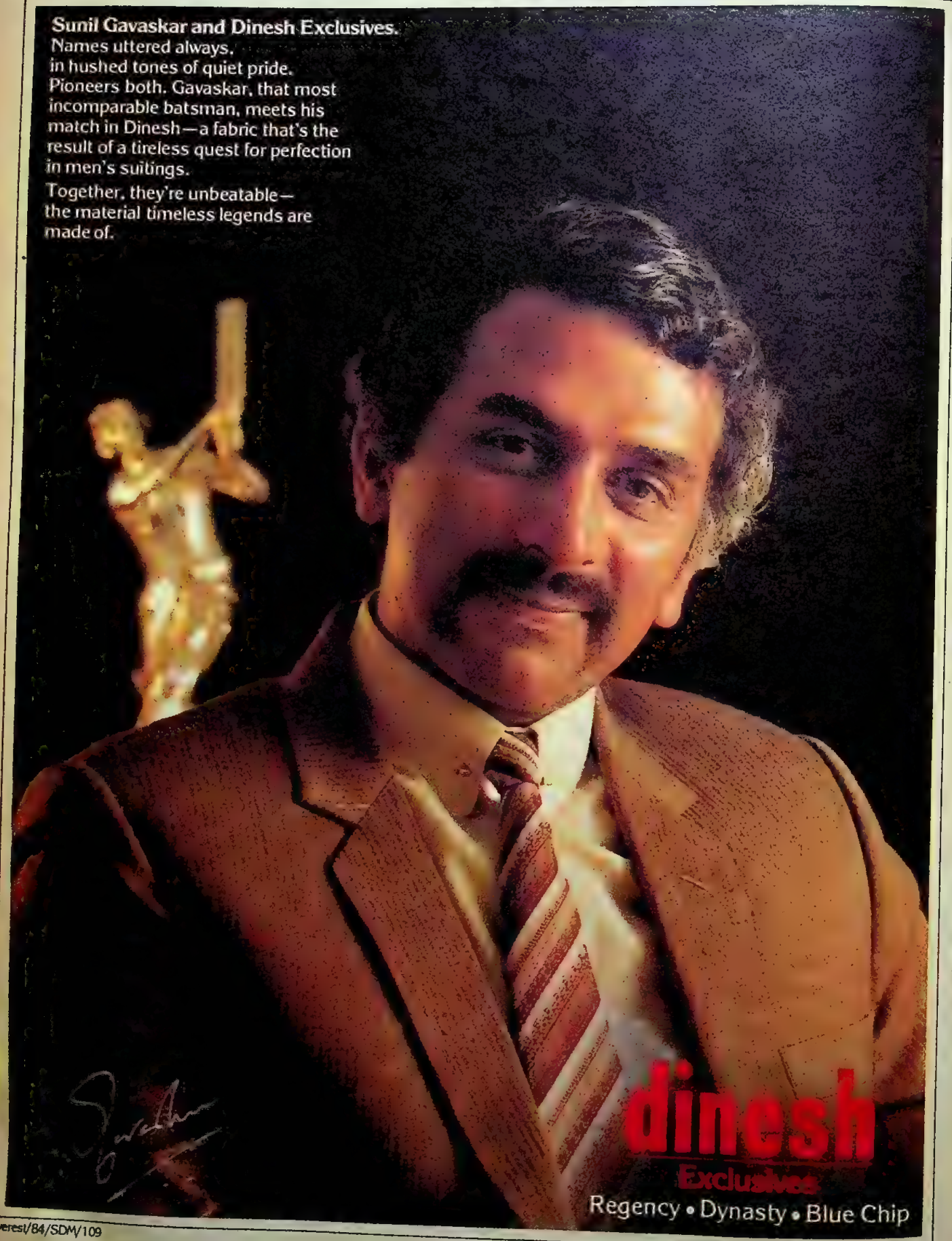
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Some names become a legend.



everest/84/SDM/109

Decades later... still the leader.

bazaar on the Assam-Agartala highway in the hope that the tribal underground would not dare to venture so far.

October 15, the date on which the TNV launched its new series of attacks, is significant in the history of Tripura. It was on this day in 1949 that the erstwhile princely state of Tripura joined the Indian union. The selection of this date made it clear that the TNV was bent upon striking an emotional chord in the hearts of the tribals, who today have become a minority in the state due to the the mass influx of Bengali refugees after partition.

But in a more ominous change in its tactics to drive home its anti-Bengali point, the TNV has now begun attacking only the houses of Bengalis, a significant departure from its earlier practice of making no ethnic distinctions. The state Government is concerned, as such a tactic could snowball into communal riots like those of 1980 which resulted in hundreds of deaths. "We are keeping a special watch on communal organisations as the Tribal Students Federation (TSF) and Amra Bangali," said a government official.

If things do get out of hand, the political organisation to be most affected will be the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)

UTTAM SAHA



CRPF jawan patrolling the highway

which has all along maintained that it has nothing to do with the secessionist demands of the TNV. Said a clearly disturbed Shyamcharan Tripuri, TUJS president: "It is actually the Marxists who are in league with the TNV and getting them to attack Bengalis so that our popularity among non-tribals is affected." But says a government official: "Even if the TUJS claim of having nothing to do with the TNV is valid, we have reports that the Tribal Students Federation, which is a front organisation of the TUJS, is trying to become something like the Mizo Zirlai Pawl, the students union of Mizoram, which is known to be the overground arm of the outlawed Mizo National Front."

Ironically, there was enough warning prior to the raids. A few days before the incidents the TNV had issued pamphlets warning of the attacks to drive away refugees from "Tripura, which will only be for tribals." Police thanas and outposts were put on special alert to ensure they were not raided, but precious little was done to safeguard ordinary people. Even more disquieting, TNV pamphlets were quite clear about the insurgents' desire to make common cause with all the secessionist groups in the country. One pamphlet said: "We support Khalistan, Azad Kashmir and the Nagaland and Mizoram movements." Equally if not more disquieting are reports with the state Government that TNF supremo Bejoy Hrangkhawl had two meetings with Bangladesh's Chief Martial Law Administrator Lt-General Ershad this year. Though according to these reports Bangladesh has so far not gone any farther than providing refuge to the TNV in the Chittagong hill tracts, intelligence sources feel that it may not be long before even arms are provided.

—SUMANTA SEN

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TAMIL NADU

Fishing for Trouble

IN ONE corner of India, there were no Diwali celebrations at all this year. Instead, the atmosphere was more akin to a mass funeral. For the people of the coastal temple town of Rameswaram, the analogy was hardly misplaced.The controversial arrest of 77 Rameswaram fishermen by the Sri Lankan navy last fortnight for allegedly fishing in their territorial waters has thrown the local populace into a state of numbed panic.

The arrests symbolise a major turning point in the life of Rameswaram and its inhabitants, mostly fishermen whose sole livelihood is the catch from the sea.For 10 days after the arrests, the town had been on the edge as the fishermen went on a peaceful agitation in protest against the arrests, not knowing what would be the fate of the 77 fishermen and their 17 mechanised boats that had been seized by the Sri Lankans.

Originally, the Sri Lankans had indicated that the fishermen would be tried in Sri Lanka.It was only with the intervention of the Indian High Commission in Colombo that the fishermen, barring the skippers of the boats, were released just in time to catch the last ferry of the season between Talaimannar in Sri Lanka and Rameswaram.

But the relief at the return of the fishermen last week is adulterated by the threat that the arrests represent to the future of the town and its inhabitants.The entire economy of the area is totally dependent on the prawns netted by the fishing boats.In the last few years, the area spanning Rameswaram, Pamban and Mandapam along the coast has become one of the largest prawn-landing areas in the south. The total prawn catch in the Rameswaram coast is around 25 tonnes which represents a market value of about Rs 25 lakh for the 40,000 fishermen and their 1,000-odd mechanised trawlers.

All that is now in jeopardy with the Sri Lankan navy threatening to cut off their lifeline to existence."We have been fishing here for centuries but now the Sri Lankan navy is threatening to starve us to death," says Sebastian Fernando, one of the organisers of the Rameswaram Verkattu Fishermen's Association(RVFA).

After the arrests, all fishing has come to a halt since the fishermen are scared of being arrested and of losing their boats. Tragically, a number of fishermen have started migrating to other parts of Tamil Nadu and the six freezing plants in the area are facing closure due to there being no catch to store.

SREEDHAR PILLAI



SREEDHAR PILLAI



Boats docked at Rameswaram (top) and fishermen who lost their boats

The storm has been brewing for the past two years during which there have been at least 12 cases registered in Sri Lankan courts against Rameswaram based fishing trawlers and two fishermen are still languishing in Sri Lankan jails. Says Fernando who was involved in one of the cases but was acquitted by the court: "Sri Lankan jails are basically torture chambers and nobody would like to stay in one for more than a day."

The crux of the problem is the fact that the Sri Lankans are convinced that the fishermen are harbouring militant Tamil Tigers and ferrying them in and out of Sri Lanka in their boats.But Alangaram, one of the fishermen, claims that Sri Lankan naval vessels are indulging in private piracy. "They allow us to fish in their waters and on the way back, they stop us and loot our catch which they sell in Sri Lanka."

Even the arrests of the fishermen are in violation of the agreement on fishing signed between the two countries in 1974. India's territorial waters end 11 nautical miles off the coast but the area is shallow and rocky and unsuitable for trawling. Under Article 6 of the agreement, it was agreed that "the vessels of both countries will enjoy in each other's waters such rights as they have traditionally enjoyed therein".

However, following the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, the country's navy has chosen to ignore the agreement. Sri Lankan fishermen do not trawl in the prawn-rich area off Kachatheevu Island since they are only interested in larger fish found in Indian waters. It is only the Indian fishermen who are able to trawl for prawns and the century-old system has been mutually beneficial, till now.

For the fishermen from Rameswaram, the arrests could not have come at a worse time since the prawn catching season has just started."This is the death knell of the fishing industry," laments Bhagyam Fernando who had two of his boats confiscated in the latest incident.Adds S.K. David, who has already lost three of his boats:"Most of us have taken loans to buy our boats and equipment and we now have no way of paying back."

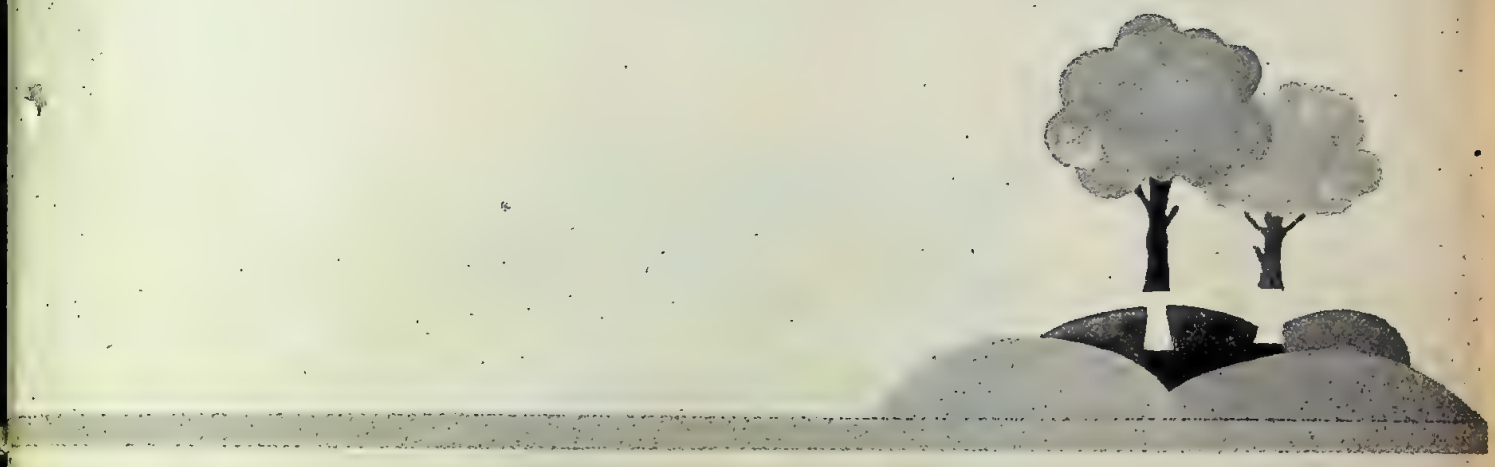
Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan authorities have imposed a curfew in the Palk Straits and stepped up patrolling by naval vessels who have been issued orders to open fire on any boats spotted during the dawn-to-dusk curfew.Added to the problem is the fact that the fishermen themselves are ignorant about territorial limits since they have no navigational aids.

But the situation may turn serious in more ways than one. Fishermen have grown desperate and are threatening to take the law into their own hands since the Indian Government has done nothing to ease their crisis.The RVFA says that they are planning to take all the remaining boats out into Sri Lankan waters and 'capture' the uninhabited island of Kachatheevu and hoist the Indian flag over the island. That, clearly, would be extreme provocation but it does symbolise what the people of Rameswaram see as their only hope for survival: to fight fire with fire.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Rameswaram

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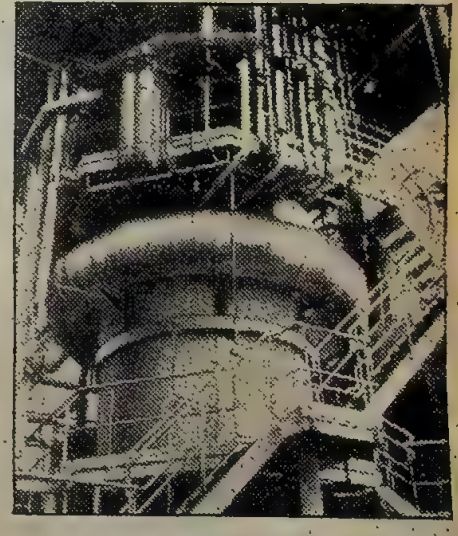
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CIA

The Indian Caper

THE RECENT arrest of Ronald Rewald, a Honolulu-based businessman, has caused considerable interest in India. In an affidavit filed in a US court, Rewald has alleged that his company was a front for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and part of its planned operations was to channel funds into India through arms deals via an Indian businessman who has close connections with Rajiv Gandhi.

FIRST Morarji Desai, now Rajiv Gandhi. India's top politicians seem to be getting more than passing attention from the ubiquitous Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—if one believes the testimony of an American who says he worked covertly for the CIA for six years from 1977. But the man concerned was indicted for fraud amounting to several million dollars, and tried to take his own life when he was found out. It is likely to be quite a while before any of the facts can be firmly established.

The CIA's alleged link with Rajiv Gandhi is contained in a set of sensational disclosures in a sworn affidavit and supporting documents seen by INDIA TODAY in Washington. In the affidavit, which has now been filed before a US Federal judge, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and an investigating committee of the US Congress Ronald Rewald, 42, has outlined what he says was a CIA plan to do business with India and channel funds to this country through a New Delhi-based businessman who claimed to be close to Rajiv. Rewald even implies that Rajiv was aware of the CIA's hush-hush project.

The India caper, which includes attempted arms deals, is but one of the several bombshells that Rewald has dropped on the CIA. Rewald decided to come in from the cold and say his piece after criminal charges were lodged against him by the US Government when the Hawaii-based international finance company he headed, Bishop Baldwin, Rewald, Dillingham and Wong, went bankrupt last year. He stands accused of having duped some 400 investors of more than £13 million (Rs 15.6 crore) which had been invested in the company but was used allegedly to buy assets for Rewald and finance his high-flying life-style. After his arrest in July last year Rewald revealed that the company, known as Bishop Baldwin, was a CIA front to gather intelligence in the Pacific and Far East and to shelter money for well-connected diplomats, and politicians who wanted to send money to the US.

The CIA at first denied and later admitted to a low-level involvement with Bishop Baldwin, saying that it was limited mainly to the use of the company's international offices as mail drop and contact points. But it acknowledged that Rewald was meeting the CIA station chief in Hawaii, and that records of these meetings —at one of which Rajiv and alleged arms deals with India were discussed— were reported back to the CIA's Langley headquarters.



Rewald leaving hospital after his suicide attempt

In the affidavit, Ronald Rewald has outlined what he says was a CIA plan to do business with India and channel funds to this country through a New Delhi-based businessman who claimed to be close to Rajiv. The India caper, which includes attempted arms deals, is but one of the several bombshells that Rewald has dropped on the CIA.

Rewald decided to sing, sources say, because the CIA disowned him and refused to come to his help when he was in trouble, or help stall government investigations into the affairs of Bishop Baldwin. According to American press reports, Rewald maintains that if anything was wrong with Bishop Baldwin's finances, it is the CIA's responsibility, not his. He has, according to these reports, not only claimed £10 million (Rs 12 crore) in commission that was not paid on an arms deal with Taiwan, but is also suing the CIA. At the moment, however, it isn't clear just who was more guilty of using whom: to what extent the CIA was using Bishop Baldwin or how far Rewald is using the CIA as a foil for his own problems.

Rewald's affidavit and documents, as far as they concern India, say that:

- Bishop Baldwin set up a secret office in India after two of its employees, Sonny Wong and Dave Baldwin, visited India in 1983 with the knowledge of the CIA station chief in Hawaii;
- The office was established with the help of Sukhcharan Singh Pasrich, an Indian with Canadian citizenship who was once a consultant with the Canadian Railways and now lives in an exclusive south Delhi neighbourhood;
- Pasrich was a close personal friend of Rajiv Gandhi and passed on to Bishop Baldwin lists purporting to be India's requirements of military equipment, among them Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) and helicopters;
- The contact was established in late 1982 through Pasrich's polo-playing daughter, Shauna, then a student at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

There are other dimensions of Bishop Baldwin's Indian connection that have come to light. For instance, there were plans for a Fund for India to be set up to channel money from non-resident Indians (NRI's) under newly announced Indian Government concessions and schemes. Rewald claims that the Fund was already set up, and had made investments in several leading Indian companies. Another was an effort to corner a contract to refit a Boeing 737 for the Indian Government's VIP squadron. The attempt failed when the Government decided not to contract out the job.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Pasrich's south Delhi residence

Rewald also said that during the winter of 1982, Rajiv had invited him through Pasrich to join the Gandhi family on a holiday "safari" at Corbett Park. Unfortunately, Rewald could not go—but, he says, Shauna did go.

Pasrich's reaction to all this is explosive. "Absolute *bakwas*, absolute rubbish," he thundered when asked to comment on Rewald's allegations, particularly his statement that Pasrich knew he was dealing with the CIA. Pasrich, 51, is no stranger to New Delhi's social circles. His wife's kindergarten school, The Study, has been attended by the young children of many of the capital's elite. Rajiv's son and daughter, Rahul and Priyanka, were there till 1978; their cousin and Menaka Gandhi's son Feroze Varun was there until three months ago and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has distributed prizes at annual day ceremonies.

Pasrich himself is a professional middleman who, apart from owning what he describes as a "very profitable" mango garden near Garhmukteshwar in western Uttar Pradesh, is the Indian representative of a non-profit Canadian management outfit, and tries to put buyers and sellers of various items in touch with each other, making his living on the commissions. "This is my work," he says shuffling a large file of letters and telexes from abroad asking for information on business. "I try and represent as many people as possible and try to find business for them."

In exclusive interviews with INDIA TODAY last fortnight, Pasrich countered Rewald's allegations, describing him as a liar, a poor businessman who had no idea of how to go about doing business with India and who had failed to come up with a positive response to any of the suggestions made to him. Pasrich says he severed all ties with Rewald when Bishop Baldwin went bust. He, however, confirms that he got to know Rewald and Bishop Baldwin through his daughter Shauna, who was studying for a master's degree in business administration in Milwaukee.

SHAUNA happens to be a keen and well-known polo player who has been the Indian junior champion. She told INDIA TODAY that when she arrived at Marquette in 1982, she looked around for polo-playing friends and met Sonny Wong. Invited to stop over in Hawaii to play polo on her way home on holiday, Shauna met Rewald. This was Rewald's prime of life: the one-time Milwaukee sports goods salesman was now head of Bishop Baldwin. He owned two ranches, a string of polo ponies, a luxurious mansion and counted among his friends various governors, actors and other luminaries.

Shauna was impressed enough to talk to him about the possibility of doing business with India. This was shortly after Mrs Gandhi had visited the US, including Hawaii, and there were hopes of more commerce between the two countries. Shauna told Rewald of her father's business with this hope. "I thought I was doing him (her father) a favour", she now rues. "It seems I've done him more harm."

Acknowledging that he had business ties with Bishop Baldwin and visited the US twice at their expenses to meet Rewald and others, Pasrich is nevertheless adamant that he had no idea of Rewald's alleged CIA links until the furore after Bishop Baldwin was declared "involuntarily bankrupt" on August 5, 1983, and the American media began to come out with revelations about Rewald.

Pasrich, who says his earnings from Bishop Baldwin were a total £12,500 (Rs 1.5 lakh) answers Rewald's allegations:

On setting up a secret office in India: Pasrich says there was no office because Bishop Baldwin could not set up shop unless the Reserve Bank of India gave them approval. Wong and Baldwin visited India in February 1983 and in July that year, Pasrich applied to the Reserve Bank for permission. But Bishop Baldwin had not supplied the requisite financial statements, and the Reserve Bank took no action. In February 1984, Pasrich's chartered accountant wrote to the Reserve Bank withdrawing the application, and dissociating Pasrich from Bishop Baldwin.

On his friendship with Rajiv Gandhi: Pasrich says he came to know Rajiv because his children attended his wife's school. But, he says, the last time he met Rajiv was when Sanjay died in June 1980, and hasn't met him since or ever discussed any business with him.

On the invitation to Corbett Park: Pasrich says he invited Rewald to come on a shoot with him in the terai, not to Corbett Park. Pasrich and his family have, he says, been going on a week-long shoot each year since the 1960s and Rajiv has never had anything to do with it.

On military supplies to India: Pasrich says that there were no lists, and this isn't the way the Indian Government buys military hardware. AWACS was never discussed but he says he did cull the press for tenders by the State Trading Corporation, the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation and the Oil and Natural Gas Commission for items like newsprint, sulphur, copper and drilling rigs to forward these requirements to Bishop Baldwin who failed to come up with any suppliers. The only aircraft discussed was the Boeing 737 for the VIP flight but nothing came of it. Pasrich says that discussions with Bishop Baldwin never went beyond the exploratory stage.

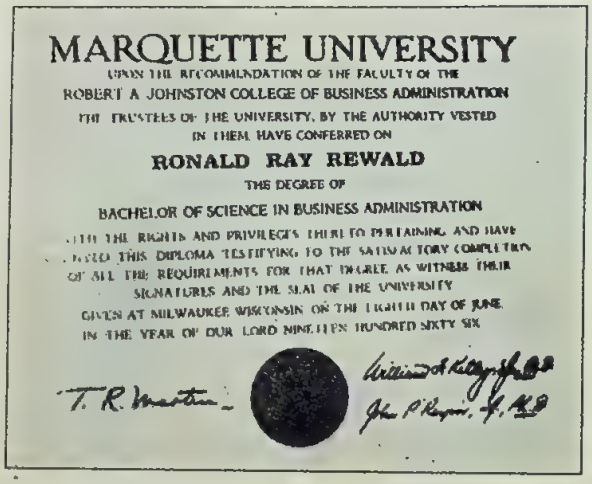
On the Fund for India: This idea, Pasrich

says, dates long before Bishop Baldwin came on the scene. Encouraged by the Government's increasingly liberal policy on attracting NRI funds, Pasrich wanted to set up a mutual fund—like the Unit Trust of India—to be subscribed to by Indians abroad. Such funds have now been set up by the Modis and Birlas, but Pasrich decided to go slow when the Swraj Paul affair broke into the open last year and Escorts and DCM refused to register Paul's shares. "I know my business," says Pasrich, "I could have brought millions of dollars into India." One businessman who met Wong in India recalls that he spoke of bringing Rs 2,000 crore to India—but the Fund was still in conceptual stage, unapproved by the Reserve Bank or by US authorities. Pasrich ridicules the contention that shares had actually been bought, as stated in Rewald's submissions. "Those were illustrative lists of companies we would like to invest in," he says.

Rajiv Gandhi was unavailable for comment, and it's Pasrich versus Rewald, whose word will carry in the end. With the CIA and FBI involved, the case isn't likely to be decided in a hurry. But the careers of the two men are vastly different, and speak for them. Pasrich, educated in Bishop Cotton School in Simla and St Stephen's College, Delhi, first went to the United States in 1956 to read for a master's degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. After working for a while in the US, Pasrich returned to India in 1959 to Goodyear's Faridabad plant, but later migrated to Canada with his wife in 1962, to work for Canadian Railways.

DURING the 1962 war with China, Pasrich collected about £2,500 (Rs 3,000) for the Prime Minister's relief fund—he keeps a letter from the prime minister's office acknowledging the donation—and returned to India in 1972 having become a Canadian citizen five years earlier. In Delhi, Pasrich started off by buying a factory making ancillary tractor parts in Faridabad which he sold, at a good profit he says, in 1982, and then went into the middleman business. His career was marked by no great successes: among the highlights he mentions is negotiating a contract with his previous employers, the Canadian Railways, to accept some 28 Indian Railway officials and technicians for training at Canadian and United Nations expense.

Although he denies it, it is of course quite possible that Pasrich garnished his sales pitch to Bishop Baldwin with references to his well-placed friends. For Rewald, who was doing business in many countries where cronyism is the rule rather than the exception, there would have been no difficulty in comprehending the importance of the "right connections". And what better contact than Rajiv Gandhi, the prime minister's son and the second-ranking leader in India, in doing business and getting contracts through. Pasrich's defence is that if he had



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ROBERT A JOHNSTON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
THE TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY, BY THE AUTHORITY VESTED
IN THEM, HAVE CONFERRED ON

RONALD RAY REWALD

THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

WITH THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES THERETO PERTAINING AND HAVE
ISSUED THIS DIPLOMA TESTIFYING TO THE SATISFACTORY COMPLETION
OF ALL THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THAT DEGREE AS WITNESS THEIR
SIGNATURES AND THE SEAL OF THE UNIVERSITY
GIVEN AT MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN ON THE EIGHTH DAY OF JUNE
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED SIXTY SIX

Rewald's "phoney" business diploma

the connections, he would have got the business: no business, no connections. Dismissing Rewald as an "operator", he says, "At least my degrees weren't forged."

The reference is to the discovery made subsequent to Rewald's arrest last year that some of his credentials weren't what they were cracked up to be. According to an investigation into the collapse of Bishop Baldwin in *Money* magazine, Rewald's diplomas in business administration from Marquette were false. So too were several other of Rewald's claims. The company's name, for instance, contained the names of Dillingham, Baldwin and Bishop—well-known and long established Hawaii families. But none of these was actually represented in the company.

Bishop Baldwin's method of operation before it went bankrupt was simple, known as a Ponzi scheme and not unknown to operators in India. Investors were lulled into depositing money with the company on a return promised at 20 per cent. Some 400 investors, including enough well-known people to warrant national media coverage to the collapse of the venture, put in £12 million (Rs 14.4 crore). In reality, money coming from later depositors was paid out to keep earlier depositors happy, but most of it allegedly went into building up Rewald's assets and financing an extravagant life-style.

The game was up when, following an anonymous tip-off, the US Internal Revenue Service began to investigate Bishop Baldwin's finances. The end result was criminal charges of fraud. None of the money has been recovered, and investigators found that this wasn't Rewald's first brush with the law: in the early 1970s, he was charged with criminal violation of Wisconsin's franchise law, to which he pleaded guilty and paid the fines.

According to American press reports, Rewald has told investigators that he came into contact with the CIA in his second year in university when he was paid to keep an eye on radical groups on campus. Then, in 1977 a CIA man in Chicago told him to volunteer his services to the station chief in Hawaii and was asked to develop intelligence in China and other countries. The relationship grew through deals negotiated in Japan and Taiwan, and Bishop Baldwin's financial operations in several Asian countries, including India, Philippines and Brunei.

Lending credence to these reports is the CIA's track record in using or setting up companies as fronts for its invidious activities. In 1979-80, for instance, the Australians disclosed that the CIA had set up the Nugan Hand Bank in Sydney in 1973 as a cover for a whole package of subversion in Australia. The CIA denied the link, of course, but the body of Frank Nugan, who along with Michael Hand set up the bank, was found in the front seat of a car, a bullet wound in the head and rifle wiped clean of fingerprints next to it. Even so, the verdict was suicide—and millions of dollars remain unaccounted till today.

Some American newspapers are openly sceptical of Rewald's allegations. "It may never be known whether the CIA sanctioned financial misdeeds on Rewald's part," the *Wall Street Journal* said, adding: "It would obviously be in Rewald's interest to exaggerate his CIA ties." Others aren't so sure. In March 1984, the Hawaii *Investor* published a lengthy anonymous account giving the opposite story, tying Bishop Baldwin with the CIA. The CIA itself has reportedly admitted only that it paid a couple of thousand dollars in telephone bills to Bishop Baldwin. Like so many CIA stories the full truth may never out, but as Rewald's case is heard in the United States, there's going to be more than a passing interest in India.

—SUMAN DUBEY with INDERJIT BADHWAR in Washington



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OCM

TWEEDS
THE PERFECT FABRIC

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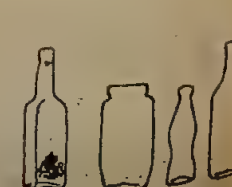
...it finds colour in Aristocrat

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Occupational Hazards

ASSOCIATED Press (AP) Correspondent, Brahma Chellaney, 27, was lucky he was neither at home nor in his office on Sunday, October 14. For if he had been in either place he would have been quietly whisked away by the Punjab Police party which had come to Delhi to arrest him. In what is by far the most unusual case involving a newsman covering turbulent Punjab, the Delhi-based Chellaney has been charged with violating the presidential notification on press censorship in the state and under Sections 153A and 295A of the Indian Penal Code (both non-bailable) for causing communal trouble and inflaming passions.

The charges against Chellaney, who avoided the police for three days and finally walked into his office only after getting interim bail from the high court relate mainly to his coverage of Operation Bluestar. Although all foreign newsmen and local representatives of the foreign press were bundled out of their hotels and sent out of the state by bus, Chellaney, who arrived in Punjab on June 4 stayed with a friend and avoided detection.

The AP correspondent's stories attracted world-wide attention because he became the only foreign newsman to actually witness the Golden Temple action, to see bodies being carted away in garbage trucks and to give a firsthand account of what was actually happening in a Punjab which was sealed to most of the press. His first story made it to the front page of *The Times* of London of June 14. It said: "Several of the more than 1,000 Sikh militants killed in Amritsar last week were shot at from point-blank range by troops who first tied their hands behind their backs, a doctor and police official said yesterday."

The Indian high commission in London reacted strongly to the story. It said the Associated Press had floated many false stories about the Amritsar action and "the latest story has been that 1,000 militants and 200 troops died... another story attributed to some unknown doctor is that 1,000 Sikhs were made to stand against a wall and shot dead". But in its hurried attempt to deny the story the high commission slipped up. *The Times* story never said 1,000 Sikhs had been lined up and shot but that "several" of the more than 1,000 killed had been lined up and shot.

But the headline to *The Times* story: "Sikhs tied up and shot" did give a misleading slant. Quipped one foreign correspondent: "It looks as though the bureau chief of the Associated Press herself wrote the story hurriedly on the basis of telephone calls from Chellaney and the attempt was to sensationalise the story." However, others who read the AP report in *The Times* said that whatever was reported at that time later did turn out to be true.

In its defence, AP pointed to a report in *The Indian Express* filed by Kanwar Sandhu on July 24 specifically mentioning instances of bodies being found with their hands tied behind their backs. The news agency also quoted INDIA TODAY for casualty figures which were confirmed later in other newspapers as well. But all this was on its way to becoming history when it was suddenly resuscitated by the Punjab Police party's arrival. Says AP Bureau Chief Victoria Graham: "We are deeply concerned by this development, all the more because of the non-bailable aspect of it and for the moment we are seeking legal opinion."

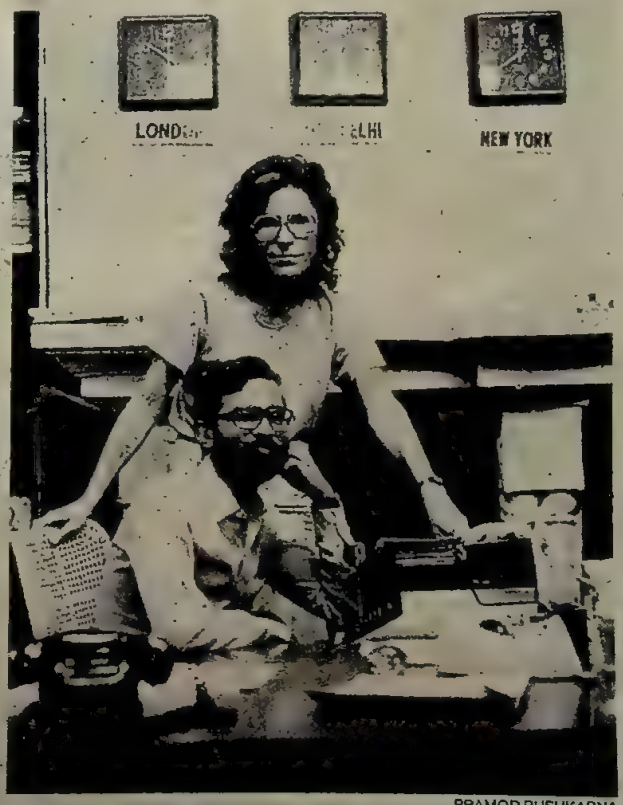
The two sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Terrorist Affected Area Act under which Chellaney is being charged give powers to the judiciary to deal with terrorism. The onus would be on the accused to prove his innocence and the trial may well be held in camera. "Would Chellaney be presumed to have provoked communal trouble in India through a story in *The Times* of London and will he have to prove his innocence?" asks Graham.

One reason for the Government's extra-hard crackdown on AP could be the style of the agency's reporting which, to quote Graham herself, is "aggressive". Although the attempted arrest of Chellaney has been condemned by almost all foreign correspondents, some of them concede that there have been some gaffes in some foreign reports on Punjab. For instance the writer of a report in a London paper was obviously wrongly informed that Gorkhas were used in the temple action when he mentioned what he thought were similarities between it and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre.

Says Satish Jacob of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC): "The problems arise mainly because we are trying to cater to a foreign audience and with some notable exceptions it is the American media which errs." The Americans, with representatives of 14 organisations, make up the largest contingent in the foreign press corps. The British follow with nine and the Soviets with six. Ironically, it is widely felt that it has been the reporting on Punjab of a foreign agency, the BBC, which has been the most extensive. One reason could be that the BBC has 30 million listeners in India, and says a staffer: "We are concerned that the listener is an Indian and he is generally well-informed."

While members of the foreign media have been expelled from India in the past, the AP incident is the first of its kind. Explained an official: "In the strictly journalistic sense, it is wrong to haul up the AP reporter but legally he has committed an offence even if he filed the report from Simla because he moved about freely in Punjab which was under curfew." For the time being at least, it seems the Government is taking a strictly legal —some would say legalistic—view of the matter. —RAJU SANTHANAM

Chellaney with Graham: defensive stand



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

MAHARASHTRA

The Critical State

IN PREVIOUS elections, Maharashtra has served as an electoral weathercock, its voting preferences being more or less indicative of voting patterns in the rest of the country. With three chief ministers since the last assembly elections and a high dissidence rate, Maharashtra promises to prove critical for the ruling party in electoral terms as Correspondent COOMI KAPOOR *reports:*



LOCATED, as it is, on the critical dividing line between the non-Congress(I) south and the Congress(I)-dominated north, Maharashtra is an electorally strategic state in more ways than one. In previous elections, it has been an accurate barometer of the pulse of the country as a whole. In 1977, when the so-called cow belt ranged behind the Janata, and Maharashtra and its southern neighbours stuck with the Congress(I), it was Maharashtra's vote count which broadly reflected the overall position in the country. A year later, in the state assembly elections, the electorate gave no party an absolute majority but the two recently split divisions of the Congress—the Congress(I) and the Congress(U) together captured a sizeable 44 per cent of the vote. In the 1980 Lok Sabha elections, Congress(I) won 39 out of the 48 seats with 52.98 per cent of the votes.

That record would indicate that Maharashtra has never strayed far from the Congress(I) fold. However, the winds of change that swept through Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh during the assembly elections have given the Opposition parties renewed hope that this time, the ruling party's most loyal bastion would go the way of its southern neighbours.

The belief that the Maharashtra voter is in the mood for a change makes for an extremely plausible scenario. Thanks to vicious infighting, a sharp increase in corruption and a steep drop in administrative standards in what was once the best-run state in the country, the ruling party's stock has never sunk as low. The state has had three chief ministers since the last assembly elections and rumours that it will have yet another have been rife ever since Vasantdada Patil took over as chief minister in February last year. So unstable has the administration been since then that Patil publicly admitted some months ago that his government was "crippled".

Admittedly, Patil has been hamstrung in his functioning. He has not been allowed to reconstitute various state corporations to accommodate his own people and neither has he been able to implement any drastic reshuffles in his cabinet which contains several of his detractors. The suspicion with which the party high command in New Delhi views Patil is deep-rooted. Patil, like most Maharashtra leaders, deserted Mrs Gandhi in her darkest hour and only returned to the fold in 1979 when the Congress(I) appeared on the come-back trail. Patil's appointment was a compromise move and the cat-and-mouse game between Patil and the party high command has been in progress since.

"We are not really a party but a conglomeration of groups," admits Jambuwantrao Dhote, Congress(I) MP who was sacked by the party high command last week. This has been characterised by the frequency with which rival groups have been shuttling to and fro from Delhi carrying tales. The public backbiting and mud-slinging even caused Patil's predecessor, Babasaheb Bhosale, to quip sarcastically: "Anyone who has the sense to start a travel agency from the MLA head-

Patil (right) and wife Shalinitai at a Sangli party meeting: loyalty problem

BHAWAN SINGH



Opposition Vulnerability

THE MOST impressive aspect of the Congress(I) grip on the electorate of Maharashtra was its exceptionally large winning margins in the 1980 elections. The 39 seats won by the Congress(I) chalked up an average margin of 28.8 per cent while the Opposition held its nine seats with an average margin of only 11.9 per cent.

Constituencies with large margins of victory are considered safe because they can withstand bigger swings against the party. By this criterion, as many as 18 Congress(I) constituencies in Maharashtra appear secure with winning margins of over 30 per cent. Only nine Congress(I) seats have margins of less than 20 per cent and of these, only three are under 10 per cent. Among the more vulnerable Congress(I) seats is Nanded, where incumbent S.B. Chavan could lose his place in parliament if there is even a relatively small swing of just over 5 per cent.

Although Madhu Dandavate retains his seat—Rajapur—with a handsome margin of 44.1 per cent, most of the other Opposition-held constituencies are extremely vulnerable to small swings in favour of the Congress(I). In the Bombay constituencies Premila Dandavate, Subramaniam Swamy and Ram Jethmalani are skating on thin ice: a mild swing of four per cent in favour of the Congress(I) could wipe them out.

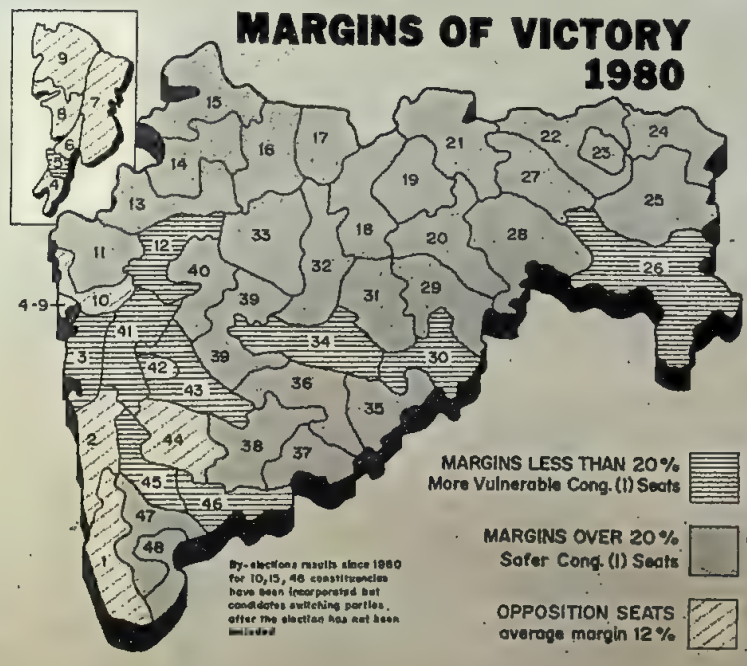
The swing in party popularity between any two elections is fairly uniform in India, but the uniformity is more observable at the state level.

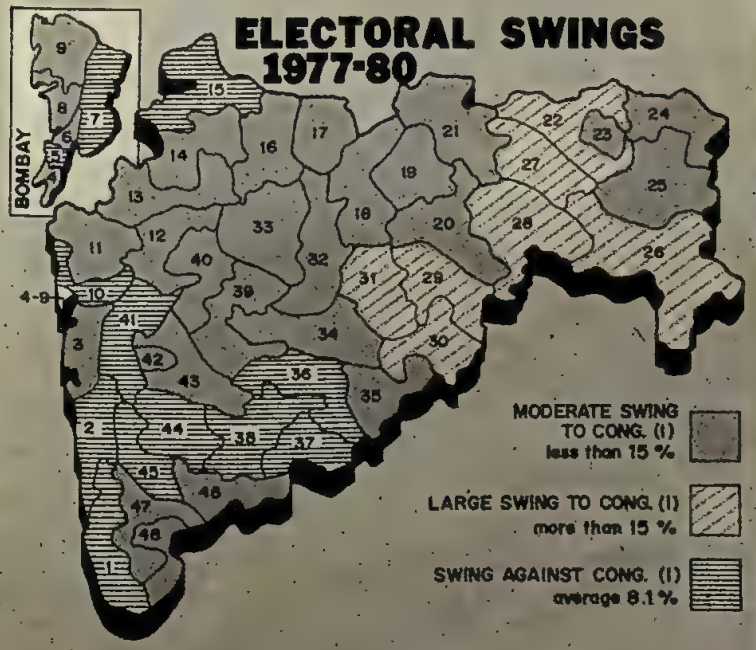
Swings tend to be more uniform where the electorate is less divided by caste and religion and where the media is well-developed. Maharashtra, over the last seven general elections, has shown greater uniformity than most other states. Between 1977 and 1980, two clear zones emerged in which swings moved in opposing directions.

In the smaller zones—stretching from Bombay down to the southern tip of the state—the Congress(I) vote was uniformly lower in 1980 than it was in 1977. Data on the last four elections has consistently reflected the immense mass support that Y.B. Chavan has in and around his constituency, Satara, which lies in the heart of this swing zone. Chavan stood as a Congress(U) candidate in 1980. The rest of Maharashtra—covering about 36 of the 48 constituencies—reported a swing in favour of the Congress(I), with the Vidarbha region in the east showing an especially large rise in its vote.

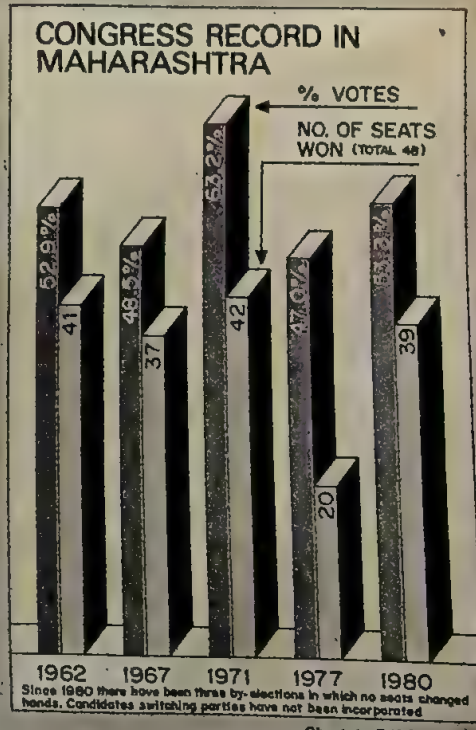
LOK SABHA CONSTITUENCIES OF MAHARASHTRA

1. RAJAPUR
2. RATNAGIRI
3. KOLABA
4. BOMBAY SOUTH
5. BOMBAY S.E.
6. BOMBAY N.C.
7. BOMBAY N.E.
8. BOMBAY N.W.
9. BOMBAY NORTH
10. THANE
11. DAHANU
12. NASIK
13. MALEGAON
14. DHULE
15. NANDURBAR
16. ERANDOL
17. JALGAON
18. BULDANA
19. AKOLA
20. WASHIM
21. AMRAVATI
22. RAMTEK
23. NAGPUR
24. BHANDARA
25. CHIMUR
26. CHANDRAPUR
27. WARDHA
28. YAVATMAL
29. HINGOLI
30. NANDED
31. PARBHANI
32. JALNA
33. AURANGABAD
34. BHIR
35. LATUR
36. OSMANABAD
37. SHOLAPUR
38. PANDHARPUR
39. AHMEDNAGAR
40. KOPARGAON
41. KHED
42. PUNE
43. BARAMATI
44. SATARA
45. KARAD
46. SANGLI
47. ICHALKARANJI
48. KOLHAPUR





Maps by B.K. SHARMA



Charts by B.K. SHARMA

quarters will make a pile."

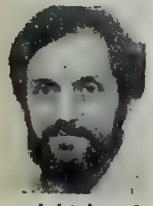
Of late, the party high command has woken up to the fact that its house in Maharashtra desperately needs to be put in order. Earlier this month, Mrs Gandhi flew in from Delhi to deliver a severe dressing down to partymen for carrying tales about each other instead of strengthening the organisation. She also had a dig at state leaders when she told party workers: "If you start working, leaders who are not doing anything will follow."

Her visit also made it clear that Patil will stay on till after the elections but the task of patching up the deep rifts within the party is an uphill one. Not even the party's famous computer can solve the problem of allotting tickets in a way that will satisfy everyone and prevent some degree of sabotage from within party ranks. The 'loyalists' in the party who have stuck by Mrs Gandhi are in a belligerent mood since Patil has been trying to sideline them in favour of 'newcomers' to the fold. That makes the question of how many seats go to Patil's nominees a tricky one. Ideally, the high command is likely to give him as few seats as possible on the premise that if no party emerges with a clear-cut majority at the Centre during the elections, Patil

ANALYSIS BY PRANNOY ROY

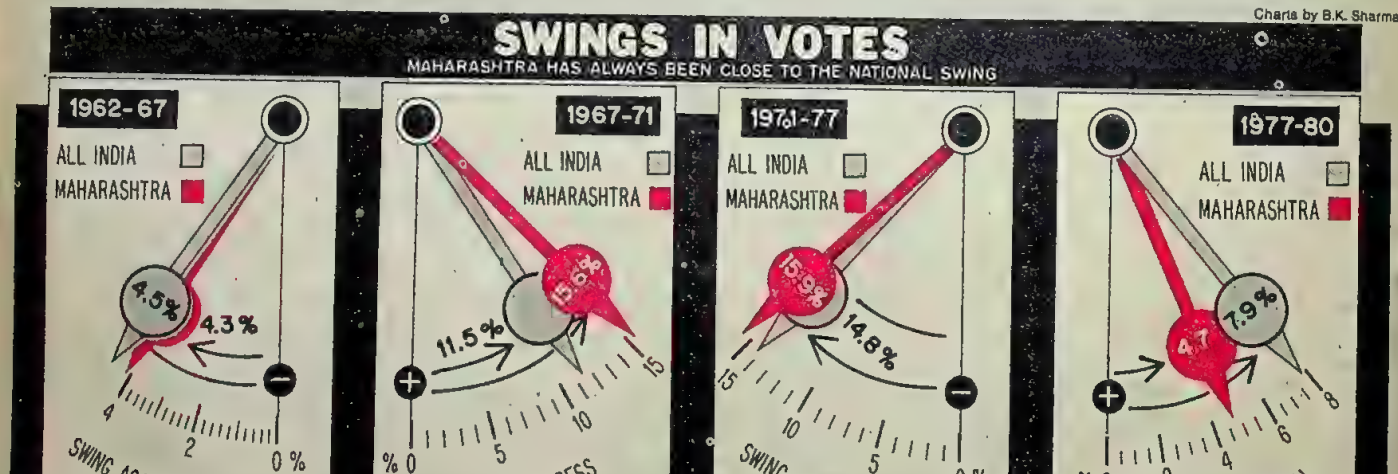
PSEPHOLOGY

Electoral Weathervane



MAHARASHTRA, unlike Uttar Pradesh (INDIA TODAY, October 31), presents a picture of solid and continuous electoral support for the Congress. Whereas in Uttar Pradesh the vote has been volatile with a large floating element, in Maharashtra there is greater consistency. The average Congress vote over the last five elections has been 53 per cent—much higher than the party's national average of 41.3 per cent over the same period. Even at its all-time low in 1977, the Congress retained a hard core of support: 47 per cent of the vote—more than 12 per cent above its nationwide support. Equally daunting, from the Opposition's viewpoint, are the huge victory margins that the Congress(I) secured here in the previous general elections in 1980 (see map, page 81). *It will need a major change in the political scenario in this state for these winning margins to be wiped out. The congress will look to retaining its vote and the opposition in its turn can be expected to aim at greater unity. Opposition unity, however, has always been fairly high in Maharashtra but if any inroads into Congress(I) support are to be made the Opposition will have to reach its 1977 level of unity. The firm Congress(I) grip on this state will be insensitive to small swings or minor improvements in opposition unity.*

Charts by B.K. Sharma



IN TERMS of political change, Maharashtra has behaved as a weathervane for the country as a whole. In every election since 1962, the swing—measured in each constituency as the change in a party's percentage vote—in Maharashtra has not only been in the same direction as the national swing but has also been of a similar magnitude. Only in the last election did the two diverge slightly: Maharashtra's 4.7 per cent swing in favour of the Congress(I) was below the national swing of 7.9 per cent.

In contrast to the volatility of states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the stable Congress vote in Maharashtra has always hovered close to a high average. This consistency is reflected in the fact that of the few constituencies nationwide that have always voted Congress, a large number lie in Maharashtra—Osmanabad, Akola, Amravati and Ramtek—and many others have not voted for the Opposition since 1962.

A swing in votes against the Congress(I) in these elections will cause fewer seats to change in Maharashtra than in many other states because of its large winning margins in 1980. All that would happen is that in many seats the Congress(I) margins would drop but it would still hold on to the constituencies. For example if opposition unity remains at its 1980 level, a 5 per cent swing away from the Congress(I) will cause it to lose only two seats; a larger 10 per cent swing will result in only six seats lost, and even with a swing away of landslide proportions, 15 per cent, the Congress(I) would still hold on to 26 seats. Of course, if these swings were accompanied by an improvement in opposition unity, the combination of the two effects would substantially reduce the number of Congress(I) seats. On the other hand, because of the small victory margins in opposition-held seats, a relatively small swing in favour of the Congress(I) would result in it winning 47 of the 48 seats in the state. With the opposition facing a large downside risk, all that the Congress(I) has to do is merely to maintain its present position in order to remain the major force in this state.

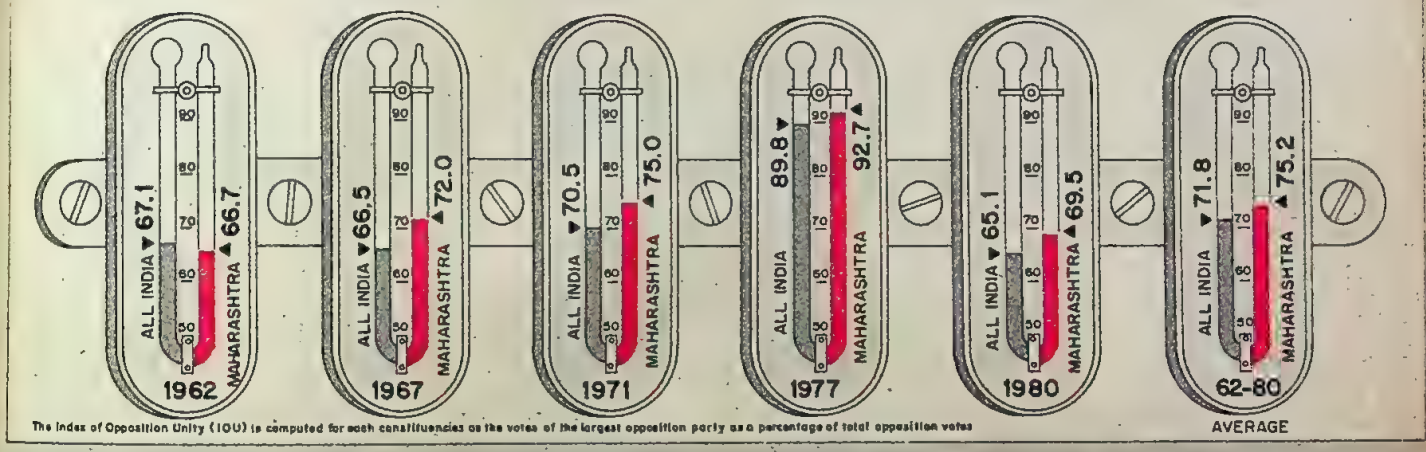
could defect with his followers. And that particular impression is one that Congress(S) leader Sharad Pawar has been doing his best to foster.

But if the Centre does restrict the number of Patil's tickets, it could prove even more dangerous.Patil has made a point of staging demonstrations of his clout whenever he is unhappy with a decision by the high command concerning elections. In the 1977 parliamentary poll, he was accused of scheming to defeat some of Defence Minister S.B.Chavan's nominees. In the 1980 assembly poll, he blocked moves to give Premilabai Chavan the Karad parliamentary constituency and is also credited with engineering the defeat of party colleagues Gulabrao Patil and Ganpat Koli from the Sangli-Valva belt.

The party loyalists, meanwhile, harbour the fear that if Patil performs well and they have little say in ticket allocation, it could render them redundant. That will make them reluctant to support Patil's nominees. Individual leaders like former deputy chief minister Ramrao Adik may wield little clout but together their displeasure could prove problematic. Regional leaders like Balasaheb Pawar, Baburao Kale, Jumbuwantrao Dhote, N.M. Tidke

THE INDEX OF OPPOSITION UNITY

OPPOSITION UNITY IN MAHARASHTRA HAS BEEN HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE



The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) is computed for each constituencies as the votes of the largest opposition party as a percentage of total opposition votes

THE OPPOSITION has historically been fairly united in Maharashtra —while it has not quite reached the unity levels witnessed in some of the southern states (*see Cover Story, page 28*) it has never recorded the disarray of Uttar Pradesh (INDIA TODAY, October 31). The index of opposition unity (IOU) which varies from zero to 100—has averaged 75.2 over the last five elections in Maharashtra which is moderately high by Indian electoral standards. But both by the standards of western democracies or by the levels attained nationwide in 1977 there is considerable room for improvement.

In 1980 the IOU in Maharashtra fell to its lowest level since 1967 and the Opposition would look to a large increase from this low base as a factor that could improve its prospects in these elections. The constituencies in the central region of the state recorded the lowest IOU in 1980 and have the greatest potential for improvement. However, keeping in mind that as a rule of thumb a 3 point increase in the IOU is like a one per cent swing away from the Congress(I), only an enormous increase in the IOU will have any impact on the distribution of seats. Even a fairly large jump in the IOU, of say 15 points, will be ineffective. The IOU will only really begin to bite once it gets back to its 1977 level.

Effective opposition and high levels of IOU can be achieved merely by seat adjustments amongst diverse opposition groups ensuring that only one opposition candidate contests in each seat—the overall unity of purpose as in 1977 is not necessary. Consequently, the outcome of the current negotiations between the Congress(S)—still some force in this state —and the PWP and communist parties on the one hand and the BJP on the other will have a significant impact on the electoral prospects in Maharashtra.



But the Congress(I)'s enormous victory margins still loom large over the electoral scene in this state. It is unlikely that any one factor—a swing in popularity or a rise in the IOU—can cause any major change in seats. Only a combination of a swing against the Congress(I) and a rise in IOU can together make a dent. In contrast, the Opposition's grip on its seats in Maharashtra is tenuous and a small swing could all but wipe them out. The return to the Congress(I) of Y.B. Chavan with his impressive electoral support in the mid-south does not brighten their prospects.

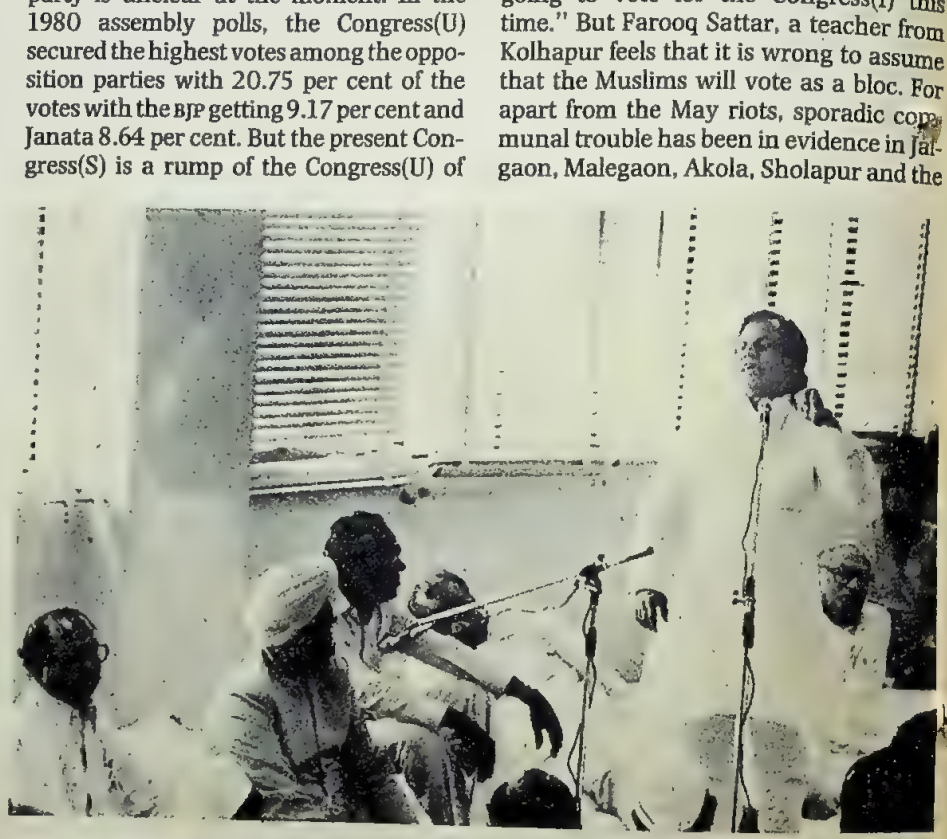
and N.K. Tirpude who are currently being sidelined have considerable mischief potential. The loyalists, in fact, have been demanding a 70:30 ratio in their favour in the distribution of tickets.

The Antulay factor cannot be ignored either. The former chief minister has his supporters and as a Muslim, some influence over the state's 11 per cent Muslim voters. Patil had embarrassed the high command into withdrawing its support for a bill to amend the Prevention of Corruption Act which Antulay had been pressing for. Patil has also accused Antulay of sabotaging his wife Shalinitai's parliamentary by-election from Sangli last year by influencing minority voters. Shalinitai's victory margin in her husband's pocket borough plummeted from 167,000 in 1980 to a mere 35,805.

As much of an issue as the intra-party disputes is the charge that the once-proud state of Chhatrapati Shivaji is being ruled from New Delhi with the local leadership merely puppets. The assault on the self-respect of the state by Delhi is a campaign issue which has paid dividends in other states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. But leader of the Opposition Sharad Pawar is reluctant to make too much of an issue out of it. "They (Maharashtrians) are very conscious of the nation as a whole and in the more cosmopolitan cities such a campaign would not go down well," he says. But Madhav Gadkari, editor of the widely-read *Loksatta*, disagrees: "The tragedy of the Opposition is that they have not played enough on regional sentiments. While discontentment is rife, they have been unable to fill the vacuum provided by the Congress(I). A Maratha Desam could sweep the state," he argues.

Pawar, however, remains convinced that the issues in the coming poll are general ones such as corruption, the state of the nation, the assaults on democracy and the neglect of the farmers and peasants. "Who will rule Delhi is a different issue from an assembly election when local issues come more to the fore."

AS THE undisputed leader of any opposition coalition, Pawar has impeccable electoral credentials. During the 19 months as chief minister when he headed the Progressive Democratic Front government, Pawar showed remarkable pragmatism and diplomacy in keeping the diverse forces together. For the last two years, the wily and ambitious peasant leader from Baramati has been single-mindedly pursuing his goal of being the next chief minister of the state. He has been systematically touring the countryside including colleges and tehsil and district headquarters and has covered some 1,800 villages so far. Though the crowds he has been collecting are large, there is still no indication of any great wave of support for him except in Marathwada. But he has been successful in recruiting a dedicated band of youthful followers. However, the actual position of his Congress(S) party is unclear at the moment. In the 1980 assembly polls, the Congress(U) secured the highest votes among the opposition parties with 20.75 per cent of the votes with the BJP getting 9.17 per cent and Janata 8.64 per cent. But the present Congress(S) is a rump of the Congress(U) of 1980 with most of the other leaders like Y.B. Chavan having left for the Congress(I).



Antulay addressing Congress legislators: considerable influence

The best organised party in the state today is the BJP which has emerged as the number two party in most areas of Maharashtra. But though it has an active and dedicated cadre of workers, the state party lacks charismatic leaders. Though its electoral position has improved considerably since 1980 it has been unable to dispel traditional suspicion among the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes. The party's urban appeal remains its major advantage in a state where a high 37 per cent of the population is urban-based.

Of crucial importance will be how the 11 per cent Muslims in the state behave. Though traditionally Congress supporters, the bloody riots this May in Bhiwandi, Bombay, Kalyan and Thane in which over 300 died and thousands were rendered homeless have badly shaken the Muslims' faith in the Congress(I)'s ability to protect them. The Patil Government has done little to restore that confidence so much so that Rafiq Zakaria, former Congress(I) MP, commented: "Never in my life have I come across such a callous attitude towards the victims of a communal riot." Says A.Khan, a senior executive from Bombay: "The Muslims are decidedly not going to vote for the Congress(I) this time." But Farooq Sattar, a teacher from Kolhapur feels that it is wrong to assume that the Muslims will vote as a bloc. For apart from the May riots, sporadic communal trouble has been in evidence in Jalgaon, Malegaon, Akola, Sholapur and the minorities' insecurity will be an issue not just in the Bombay-Bhiwandi belt, which is in any case an Opposition stronghold, but in other constituencies such as Nasik, Malegaon and Jalgaon as well.

An alienated Muslim voter would, however, turn hostile if there is to be any opposition adjustment with the Shiv Sena. Says Sena chief Bal Thackeray: "We are part of the Opposition but we don't need an approval stamp from anyone." So far, however, the Opposition has resisted Sena overtures and Pawar is adamant that the Sena does not figure in his electoral calculations. The Opposition alliance in the state consists of the Congress(S), the Janata, Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), CPI, CPI(M) and an electoral adjustment with the BJP.

That diversity will make distribution of tickets difficult. The Opposition squabble over seats will be most marked in Bombay city, where five of the six Lok Sabha seats went to the Opposition in 1980. Today, the city is even more antagonistic towards the

Congress(I) thanks to the long drawn-out textile strike, riots, price rises and a general resentment in the falling standards of the city. But if there is no agreement on seats, the Opposition could still be in trouble.

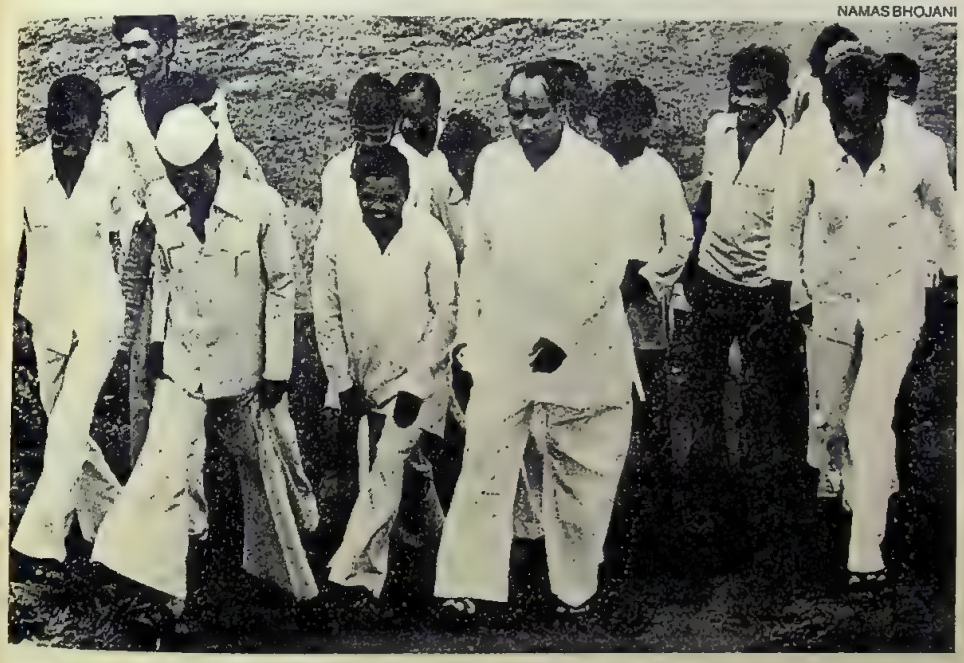
There are signs that the battle has already been joined. In the Bombay north-east seat, Subramaniam Swamy, the Janata maverick who has represented the constituency for the last two terms, has antagonised the BJP and sections of the Janata by his constant baiting. For the BJP, it has become a prestige matter that he be defeated. Says Pramod Mahajan, BJP general secretary; "This is our traditional constituency and we will not give it up to anybody". Swamy, however, has nursed the constituency well and is equally determined to fight. Pawar, meanwhile, has opted to support Datta Samant, the fiery trade union leader who was defeated in a three-cornered contest the last time. Samant holds sway among the factory workers but is unacceptable to the middle class.

In south Bombay, the BJP is pressing for Janata candidate Rattansinh Rajda to be replaced by MLA Jayantibhai Mehta since the party's assembly vote in the southern sector was 97,241 against 18,162 for the Janata. In Bombay north, Ravindra Verma has failed to nurture his constituency and people like Mrinal Gore will undoubtedly be pressing their claims. The BJP, meanwhile, has a number of potential candidates for other Bombay seats as well, including industrialist Viren Shah who this month defected from the Janata to join the BJP ranks.

If the Opposition can work out an accord in Bombay, it is securely placed to take all six seats plus a majority of the five seats in the neighbouring Konkan belt. Even Antulay has indicated that he might not contest from his Raigarh seat since the PWP has established a powerful base there.

ONE PARTY that has been completely ignored so far in any seat adjustment talks is Menaka Gandhi's Rashtriya Sanjay Manch which is largely dismissed as an upstart group with no base. But in the eastern Hindi-speaking Vidarbha region, she has been drawing surprisingly large crowds and is one of the few leaders apart from her mother-in-law to fill Nagpur's huge Kasturchand Park. Menaka has won considerable support among the weaving community and the Opposition is banking on the Manch cutting into the ruling party votes.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Pawar campaigning: significant force

Vidarbha has been all along faithful to the Congress(I). But it is the most backward region in terms of development and politicians of all hues have been decrying the neglect of the region, particularly with a partial drought in the area. The ruling party is expected to pump in lot of relief funds before the elections. But it is also a region with a high number of discontented politicians from the ruling party including Dhote, Adik's son-in-law, and N.K. Tirpude, the former deputy chief minister, both of whom have been ignored by Patil though they wield considerable electoral clout in the area. Last elections, the ruling party made a clean sweep of Vidarbha's 11 seats. This time, it will find it difficult to repeat that performance.

The cotton and sugar belt of Marathwada representing eight Lok Sabha seats is a Pawar stronghold as indicated by his ex-tensive tours of the area. Baburao Patel, a cotton farmer from Parbhani, feels like many others of his calling, that the benefits for the farmers have all been in favour of the sugar farmers. "What Pawar is saying makes sense," he says. Central ministers like S.B.Chavan and Shivraj Patil will be contesting from this region and they will find the going tough. Traditionally, the younger generation in the region has always flocked behind Pawar while the elders continue to plump for the Congress(I).

Around the intellectual capital of Pune, the Opposition is better placed than in the southern sugar cooperative belt where old stalwarts such as Vasantdada and Chavan hold electoral sway. But that could be neutralised if the ruling party puts up candidates not acceptable to the Maratha lobby. In his election report to the high command, Patil claimed that the party could win 40 out of the 48 seats if he was given a free hand. But this announcement to the press regarding his report has further irked the loyalists who see it as an assertion of his independence from the Central leadership. Congress(I) men, particularly the dissident lobby, admit privately that the feedback from the countryside towards the party is not very favourable. Observes Dhote: "It looks quiet but it could be that people are watching and waiting to make their unhappiness felt. The lull before the storm."

Pawar, on the other hand, is confident that he can win a minimum of 18 to 20 seats and feels that the number could increase as the poll draws nearer. The problem is that no single opposition party is powerful enough on its own. Leftist parties like the PWP have pockets of influence but are antagonistic towards the BJP. One of the founder members of the PWP, Krishna Rao Dhulip, quit the party last month to join the BJP, only adding to the friction. The Janata is strong in the Konkan from where Madhu Dandavate hails but the Janata is a natural rival to the BJP in a number of urban constituencies while the BJP and the Congress(S) could also have differences over the Vidarbha allotments.

All factors considered, the general dissatisfaction and the tarnished image of the ruling party indicates that the Congress(I) cannot repeat its 1980 performance. The question is just how many seats it will finally concede to the Opposition. Much, therefore, will depend on what kind of impression the Opposition makes on the electorate and how it conducts itself in the crucial run-up to the poll, or, for that matter, the ruling party.

KERALA

Extradition Demand

FOR THREE long years he had been on the run, wanted by the security forces of two countries. Then, last May, luck finally ran out for Gopinath Nadukkidy Seetharaman 47, master embezzler. Wearied of the constant pressure and the effort involved in trying to cover his tracks, Seetharaman walked in to a Cochin police station and gave himself up.

While the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Crime Branch of the Kerala police squabbled over the credit for running him to ground, inside Cochin jail the real saga of Seetharaman was actually just beginning. Since his arrest last May, Seetharaman has been the focus of a highly sensitive and complex diplomatic drama being played out behind the scenes regarding his future.

The agency that Seetharaman embezzled 19 million Dirhams (Rs 5.8 crore) from is the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department of the Government of Dubai where he was employed. The money was milked from the bank account of the Dubai National Air Travel Agency (DNATA) which happens to be owned by Sheikh Rashid, prime minister of Dubai. Ever since Seetharaman's arrest, the Dubai Government has been steadily bringing increasing diplomatic pressure on the Indian Government to have him extradited and face trial in Dubai. Last fortnight, it was clear that the case was turning into a major confrontation between the Central Government and the judiciary. The Kerala High Court has granted Seetharaman a stay order on the grounds that there is no extradition treaty between the two countries while the Indian Government, anxious not to raise diplomatic hackles in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has been making frantic efforts to get an extradition order.

Seetharaman's lawyer, M.N. Sukkumaran Nair, is convinced that the extradition cannot take place. "He is an Indian citizen and he will have to be tried here under Indian law," he says. He adds that under Section 188 of the Criminal Procedure Code, it only remains for the Central Government to sanction prosecution in the case. This would mean that all the witnesses would have to appear in Cochin. Sheikh Rashid has reportedly agreed to this and is even willing to fly all the witnesses out to India at his expense.

But that does not mean that the Dubai ruler has given up his efforts to get Seetharaman extradited. In August, when an Indian Airlines aircraft was hijacked to Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed, the ruler's son, had made a deal with the Indian Government that Seetharaman would be extradited to Dubai in return for the extradition to India of the seven hijackers. Since then, the External Affairs Ministry has been pressurising the Home Ministry to expedite the extradition as promised by Minister of State for External Affairs, A.A. Rahim, who flew to Dubai during the hijacking.



GULF NEWS PHOTO



Sheikh Rashid (top) and Rahim in Dubai: diplomatic pressures

After Rahim's return, the pressure shifted to the Kerala Government. As state Home Minister Vayalar Ravi admitted, "Every time I used to go to New Delhi, certain top officials repeatedly requested me to follow up the Seetharaman case as soon as possible." But that, ironically, only served to make matters worse. The Kerala Government, its partisan sensibilities aroused, has been making every effort to stall the extradition proceedings by passing the buck to the judiciary.

The main motive seems to be to protect a fellow Malayalee from what they believe will not be a fair trial in Dubai. The embezzlement of such a large amount of money from one of his own companies has been taken as a personal affront by the Dubai ruler and it has become a matter of prestige. Not that there is any doubt about Seetharaman's involvement in the crime. A Commerce graduate from Tellicherry on the Malabar coast, Seetharaman went to the Gulf in the '60s and joined DNATA in 1967. Within a short time, he was made chief cashier of the company and had won the trust of Sheikh Rashid and his other Arab partners. DNATA was the sole selling agent for all major airlines operating into Dubai and Seetharaman was strategically placed to siphon off money by juggling the accounts. In 1981, realising that he had reached the limit, Seetharaman skipped the country, reaching India on airline ticket vouchers stolen from the company.

In India, he successfully evaded the massive police dragnet spread all over the south after a Dubai court issued a warrant for his arrest three days after he left the country in April, 1981. Since then, he had been moving from city to city, staying with relatives in Tellicherry and Cochin, running an electronic goods shop in Madras, hiding out in Bangalore, dabbling in real estate in Mysore.

By last May, with the net growing tighter, Seetharaman was also haunted by fears of being kidnapped by mercenaries and whisked away to Dubai. In a desperate gamble, filed a writ petition stating that he was ready to surrender before the local police and that being an Indian citizen, he could not be extradited to Dubai. The high court obliged with the stay order.

But the order clearly symbolises only a temporary reprieve. Since his confinement in Ernakulam sub-jail, Seetharaman has refused to meet anybody except his wife and his lawyer, waiting for the start of the trial that he hopes will be in Cochin. But much will depend on whether the Indian Government decides to keep its promise to Sheikh Mohammed. If it does, Seetharaman may yet get his trial, but in a Dubai court instead.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI


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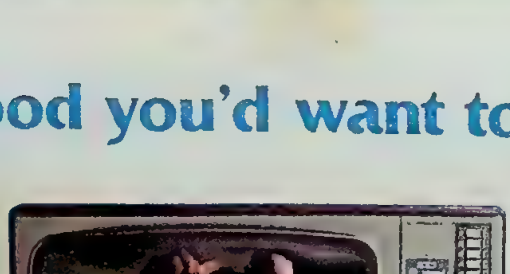
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BANGLADESH

Back to the Barracks



THE HOPE for a transition to democracy once again eluded Bangladesh, the second most populous country in the Indian subcontinent. Last fortnight, after flirting briefly with the idea of parliamentary elections on December 8 which neither the ruling junta could concede nor the politicians opposed to it could accept, the nation was back again on the path of uncertainty. With neither the military nor the politicians able to muffle the other, Bangladesh seemed clearly headed for endless, and possibly bloody, civil strife.

The President and Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA), Lt-General Hossain Mohammed Ershad, has not yet reneged on his offer to hold the polls to the country's 300-seat National Assembly on December 8. Nomination papers too have been invited on November 1. But the major political parties have made it clear that they will not go to the polls unless Ershad withdraws martial law and removes from his part-civilian part-military cabinet the 11 members of his puppet party, the Jana Dal.

Ershad, who had lately betrayed an accommodative spirit and had actually accepted some of the politicians' demands, turned his back firmly on this one, saying: "If the major political parties do not come to the polls the martial law will continue." But it is doubtful if his 76,000-strong army can hold on a leash the movement whose ferocity is intensifying day by day and which is led by political groups along the broadest possible spectrum.

To Ershad's main opponent groups—the 15-party alliance headed by the Awami League of Sheikh Hasina Wajed and the 7-party alliance presided over by Begum Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—the latest addition is the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami. On October 14, the three parties held rallies of an unprecedented scale on the streets of Dhaka and announced their separate but well-orchestrated decision to boycott the elections unless their conditions were met. Begum Zia, by far the most charismatic of Ershad's political adversaries in the field, took the battle a step further with the announcement that there would be a nation-wide general strike on December 8, the day appointed by the military authorities for the elections, followed by a "non-cooperation movement" which is the Bangladeshi shorthand for a no-tax campaign. The late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had also begun a no-tax campaign in erstwhile East Pakistan prior to the army crackdown in 1970.



"If the major political parties do not come to the polls, the martial law will continue."

LT-GENERAL H.M. ERSHAD,
chief martial law administrator

The rallies of October 14 were attended by half a million people, the mood of whose participants, according to a western diplomat in New Delhi who was a witness, was "defiant and strongly emotional". Both Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia declared at the rallies their plan to observe a resistance week from October 27. Within days, their representatives were sitting together in Dhaka to set up joint action committees down to the village level with the intention of resisting an apprehended army swoop-down on leaders and activists.

Earlier, Ershad had adopted a conciliatory line for sometime, conceding all but one (that of withdrawal of the military rule) of the two alliances' five-point demands. But he erred on the side of pampering beyond limits the junta-created Jana Dal and had clearly lost control over the criminal elements that had infiltrated the party like ants recognising sugar crystals. His helplessness to curb the demonic forces within the Jana Dal was fully in evidence when an Opposition-called bandh on September 27 was marked by bloody violence.

On that day, Moyez-ud-din Ahmed, a former MP of the Awami League and vice-president of the Bangladesh Red Cross Society, was brutally murdered by the knife and automatic weapon-wielding army of pro-Jana Dal 'strike-breakers' whose pictures were published even in *Bichitra*, a state-owned news magazine. It was particularly embarrassing for Ershad because the main accused in the murder of Moyez-ud-din, Azam Khan, had been released from a 14-year detention recently following an inexplicable and entirely unlawful 'presidential pardon', to be admitted into the Jana Dal. Azam was convicted for the murder of a journalist and a trade union leader in 1982. It was only six months ago that Ershad had introduced Azam to a public rally held on the outskirts of Dhaka, describing him as "my brother".

Azam was promptly put behind bars again. Mahbub-ur Rahman, the most discredited Jana Dal minister in Ershad's Cabinet who had been instrumental in packing the party with back-street goons and who had also been elevated to the post of the party's secretary-general, was made to step down from both the party and the Government. Mijanur Rehman Chowdhury, the former Awami League minister who took over as the Jana Dal's new secretary-general, tried to assuage the general feeling of outrage in the country and said he would negotiate a "package deal" with the Opposition for which he said he had "sanction from the President within certain limits".

In a modest rally on October 10 by the Jana Dal, filled mostly with rented crowds, Ershad himself announced a series of soft measures, the high points of which are:

- ▶ On November 1, the day for filing nomination papers, the offices of the district martial law administrators would be withdrawn;
- ▶ On November 16, the offices of the sub-zonal martial law administrators would also be abolished;
- ▶ On December 1, offices of the deputy chief martial law administrators would be done away with and simultaneously the



Sheikh Hasina Wajed (inset); the mammoth opposition rally in Dhaka

suspended fundamental rights and writ jurisdiction of the high courts be restored.

Ershad later said in an interview that he could go "thus far and no further". He said the main demand of the Opposition is that "they want power here and now". He promised that the martial law would be lifted "the day the Parliament goes into session". With regard to the Opposition demand for a "neutral government" which alone can supervise the elections, he said: "I assure you that we shall follow the examples set by the late president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman and also the British and Indian traditions." But he would neither revoke the martial law nor step down before the elections. "In the US, has President Reagan resigned from his post?"

In a telephonic interview with INDIA TODAY, a member of the presidium of the Awami League in Dhaka explained that the elections under martial law were unacceptable to them. He said: "Elections with army units directing the poll machinery cannot but be a farce. We don't want to create misunderstanding with the seven-party alliance headed by Begum Zia at this stage, but her husband used the same ploy to completely rig the elections, resulting in the illegal capture of nearly 90 per cent of the Assembly seats. The offer of restoring fundamental rights is only a joke because in the past 31 months the military rulers have destroyed all institutions in this country, including the judiciary."

Ershad is probably worried because his true constituency—the army—will not permit a transition to civilian rule without its officers having a final veto on the constitution which obviously has to be heavily rewritten. Retired and serving army officers control virtually all the 241 departments of the Government and the 141 autonomous bodies and are either open or covert partners in most of the country's foreign trade (Rs 2,400 crore in 1981-82).

On October 16, an urgent meeting of the officers of the Dhaka garrison was convened with Ershad in the chair. The meeting reviewed the call by the two alliances and the Jamaat to boycott the elections and obviously decided to brace itself for rough times ahead. Ershad sounded particularly strident after the meeting, saying he did not care "if the martial law continued", and that the "army is united and is with me".

BUT THAT may be a pure barrack-room hyperbole. Currently under top-secret investigation is a plot in Bangladesh by a few retired army officers —in collaboration with some elements in the army whose names have not been disclosed—to import shiploads of arms from Italy with the obvious intention of overthrowing the Ershad regime. The men who have been arrested in this connection were all involved in the August 15, 1975 coup in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed. Some of them are: Colonel (retired) Shahriar Rashid Khan; Colonel (retired) Farooq; and Major (retired) Bajlul Huda. Bajlul had returned only a month ago from Islamabad where he had served a term as the first secretary in the Bangladesh Embassy. These officers, with political contacts cutting across all non-Awami League parties, form a fanatic fringe still harbouring the ambition of capturing power through another coup.

The present divisional commanders in the Bangladesh army are a professional lot and not as mercurial as those who had sought to dominate the country's politics through conspiracy and liquidation. But they do not want Ershad to offer power back to the politicians on a platter. The Opposition feels that they favour Ershad's "civilianisation" plan only to the extent that the pliant Jana Dal should come to power. Said Sheikh Hasina: "We must resist the implementation of the blueprint by the Government to perpetuate the rule of the illegal Jana Dal Government."

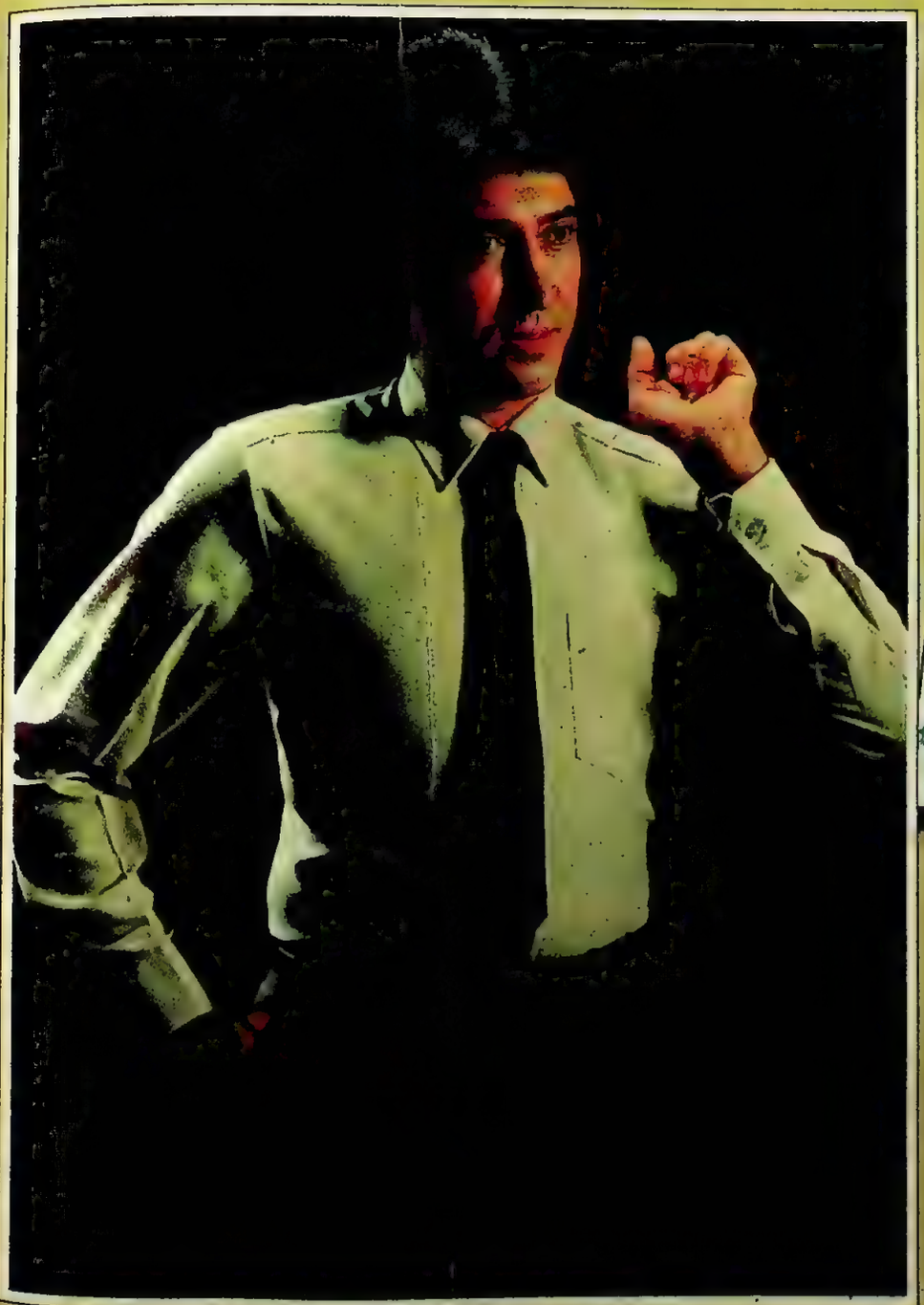
The election machinery in Bangladesh is meanwhile going through the motions. Justice A.K.M. Nurul Islam, the chief election commissioner appointed by the Ershad regime, has already appointed 64 returning officers and an extensive retinue of electoral staff. But Ershad can easily back down on his offer of polls on December 8 if nomination papers are not filed by the Opposition parties on November 1. The regime has also hinted at the polls "getting delayed" because of the September floods which affected 403 of the 460 upazillas.

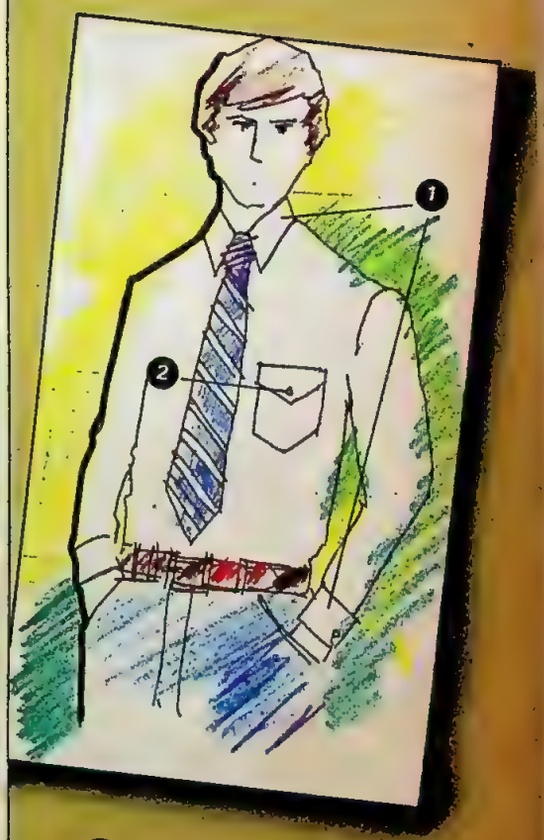
But discontent is spreading across Bangladesh like a dab of ink on blotting paper. In the past two months, doctors, teachers and journalists have periodically been on strike. Bangladesh Biman, the country's only airline, was crippled by a three-week-long strike of pilots and flight crew, as a result of which Pakistani pilots had to be hired to keep the airline's fleet flying. From Dhaka University, the traditional focal point of student unrest in Bangladesh, militancy among students has spread to distant Chittagong University.

The military rule in Pakistan, Bangladesh's former partner, has continued because of the inability of the democratic forces there to match up to it—in strength, if not in popularity. The military rulers in Dhaka may possess the will of their Pakistani counterparts to rule their country, but, in the ultimate analysis they may not have the strength.

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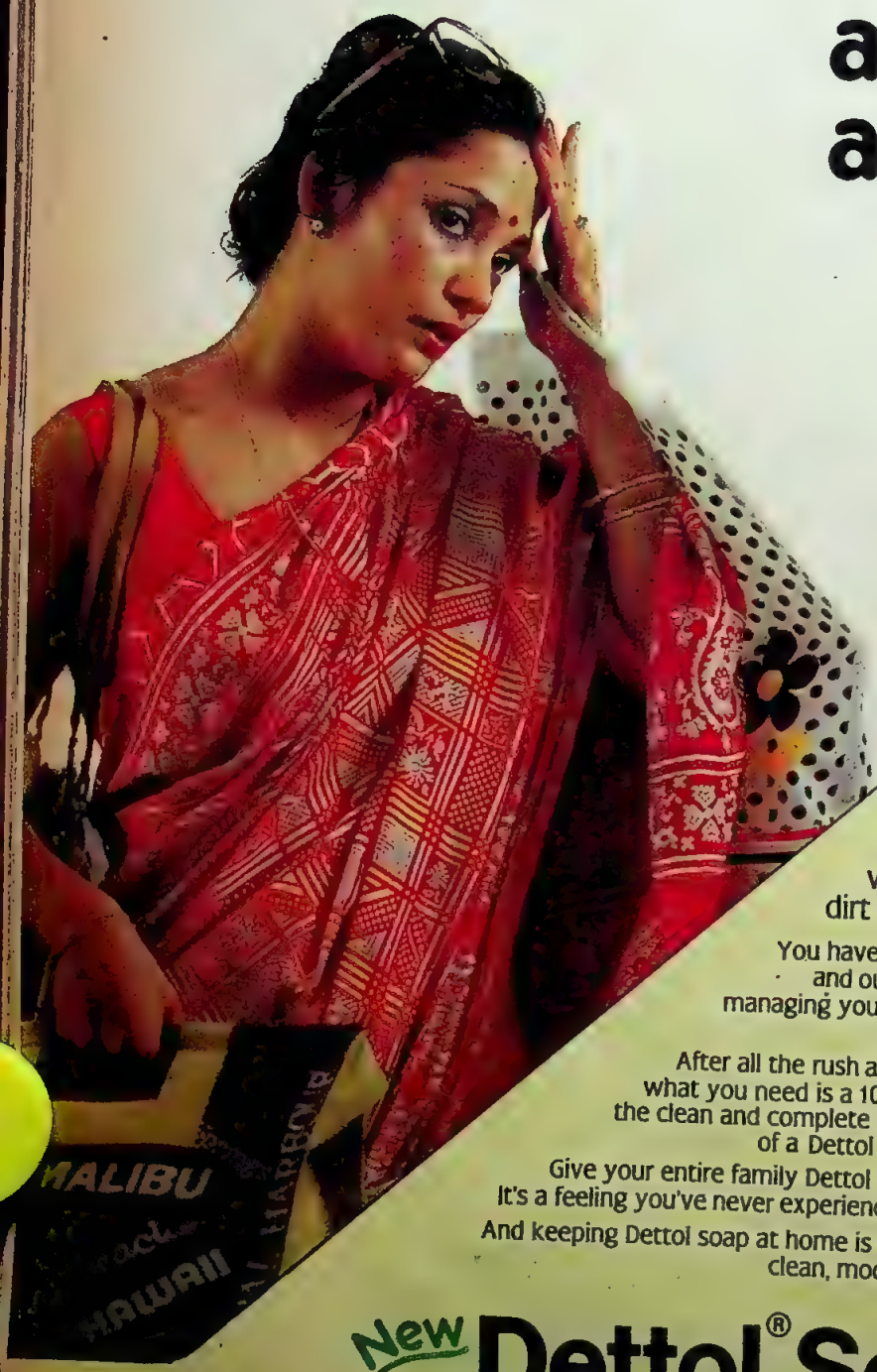
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SWITZERLAND

Unwanted Tamils

THEY couldn't keep themselves out of trouble. They had frequent brawls, some turned alcoholic and in a country where even a petty theft is a sacrilege, they were accused of gang-raping a woman. A fortnight after the incident, the axe fell. Based on assurances provided by the Sri Lankan Government, the Federal Council of Switzerland announced on October 1 that all Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum in the country would be sent back. Lack of space to absorb the refugees was cited as a reason. "If we let people stay in our country till they are safe to return to their own, then Switzerland will become very popular in the Third World," said Rudolph Friedrich, minister, department of justice and police.

Even as various organisations cried "shame" and the press denounced the move as "draconian", the administration last fortnight produced a list of the first 10 persons who would be required to leave Switzerland immediately.

For a year now large numbers of Tamils from Sri Lanka have been coming into Switzerland and seeking political asylum (INDIA TODAY, May 15). As their numbers grew, so did public resentment. In late August the Swiss Government sent a two-member fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka. The officials concluded that it was indeed safe for the Tamils to be sent back in view of the assurances given to them by "very senior politicians".

"The fact-finding mission was a farce. The decision to send the refugees back was taken first—then facts were found to legitimise that earlier position," said Thomas Bernhart of Amnesty International, Berne. In a letter to the Swiss Government, Amnesty restated that Tamils were in great danger in Sri Lanka and should not be sent back. As if to prove them right, the Sri Lankan Government issued a statement saying all refugees returning from Switzerland may be arrested if found withholding information.

Neither does the "lack of space" argument hold especially when viewed against the fact that Switzerland at one point absorbed as many as 16,000 Hungarians and 14,000 Czechoslovakians. "According to the police there are only 1,500 Tamils and the real reason is that the Swiss just don't want them," Bernhart said. Said a journalist from Berne: "Berne is a very conservative city and elements of racism are not hard to detect."

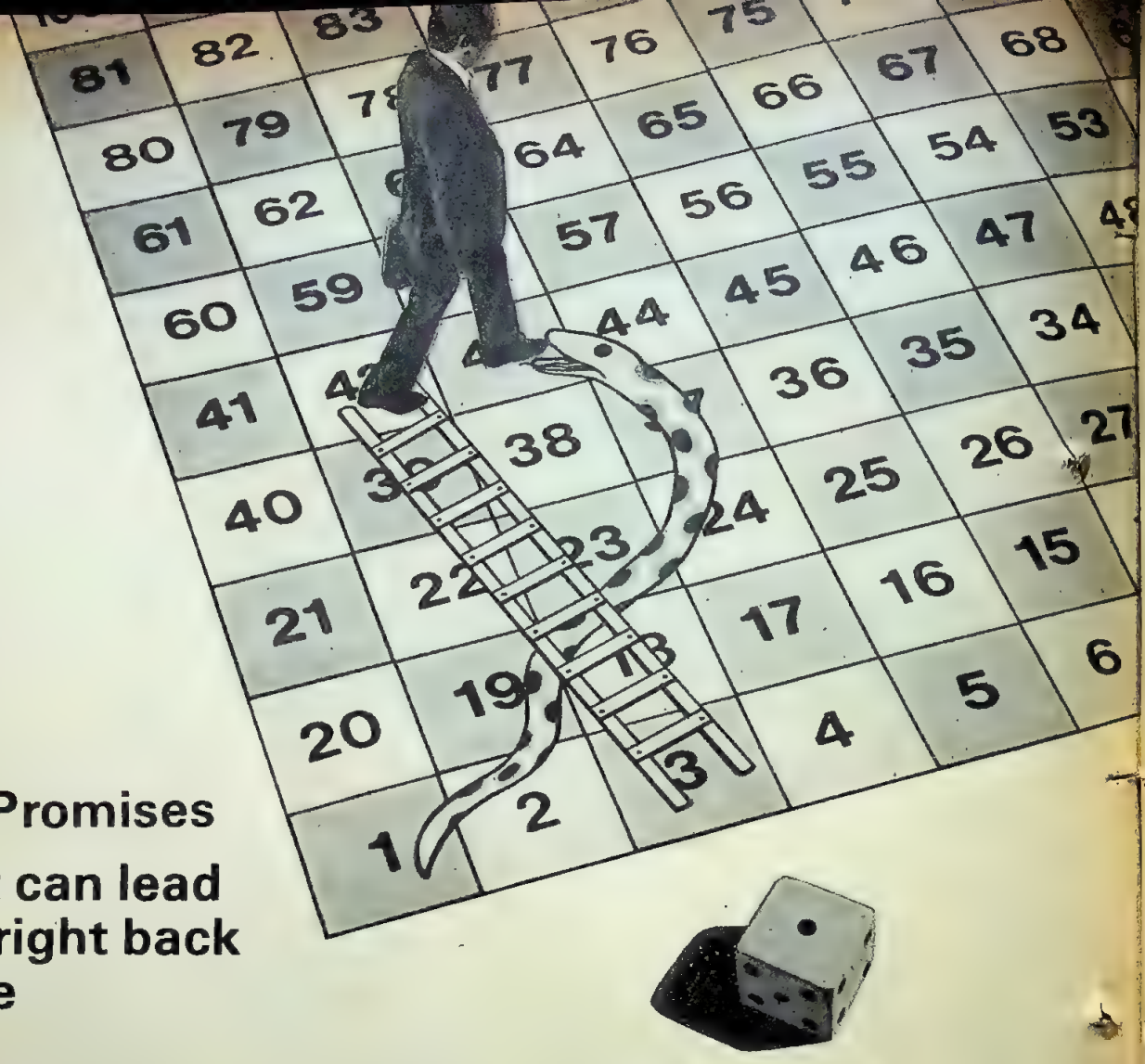
Said one of the refugees, K. Param: "There has been too much negative publicity against us, the most recent one being that one of rape." While the media crucified nine men accused of raping a mentally retarded woman, the judge was less forthcoming. He doubted the woman's statement because of gaps in her testimony. "We never denied that the incident occurred—but it was not rape," said S. Muthulingam. "She said two men dragged her into the camp and nine of us raped her—the truth is she was our friend and came to the camp voluntarily, as do our other girl-friends," he added.

The problem of the Tamils in Switzerland is compounded by reports that young men from the Third World are coming to Europe for jobs. Figures of Tamils in Switzerland vary, ranging from 2,000 to 20,000, thus contributing to the panic. There is good reason to believe that the officials in Berne look upon the Tamils as economic migrants, despite growing evidence about atrocities against Tamils in Sri Lanka. "Not all of them are economic migrants," said Father P.A. Sinnaraja of the World Tamils Movement, Madras. Sinnaraja, who was tortured before he escaped to India, was touring Switzerland appraising the refugees of the situation in Sri Lanka. "The Swiss Government's decision is unfair especially when Lalith Athulathmudali has made a statement that the refugees returning from Switzerland can be arrested," he added.

And as the refugees continue to hang between hope and despair, there is now a move by the Centrastelle fur Fluchtling Hilfe (Swiss Centre for Aid to Refugees) to appeal to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. So far only one Tamil has been granted asylum in Switzerland and that, according to Amnesty, was the result of an "administrative accident".

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is fairly toothless in the affair, issued a statement on October 12 urging the Swiss Government to take stock of the dangers faced by Tamils in Sri Lanka. "The decision is contradictory. It says everybody cannot get refuge, neither can everybody be sent back—who decides who is to go back," Bernhart said. Frustrated by their efforts to sift the "real refugees" from the "economic migrants", the Government appears to have finally settled for a blanket decision. Friedrich resigned (for health reasons) the day he announced his decision, and it is generally believed that the decision was the result of his convictions that the Tamils should go home. "People are being killed all over the Third World—danger to life can no longer be a criterion for us to decide on the question of granting asylum," he said. Several groups in Geneva and Berne are taking up cudgels, questioning the legality of the Swiss decision. They ask—if danger to life is not reason enough, then what is?

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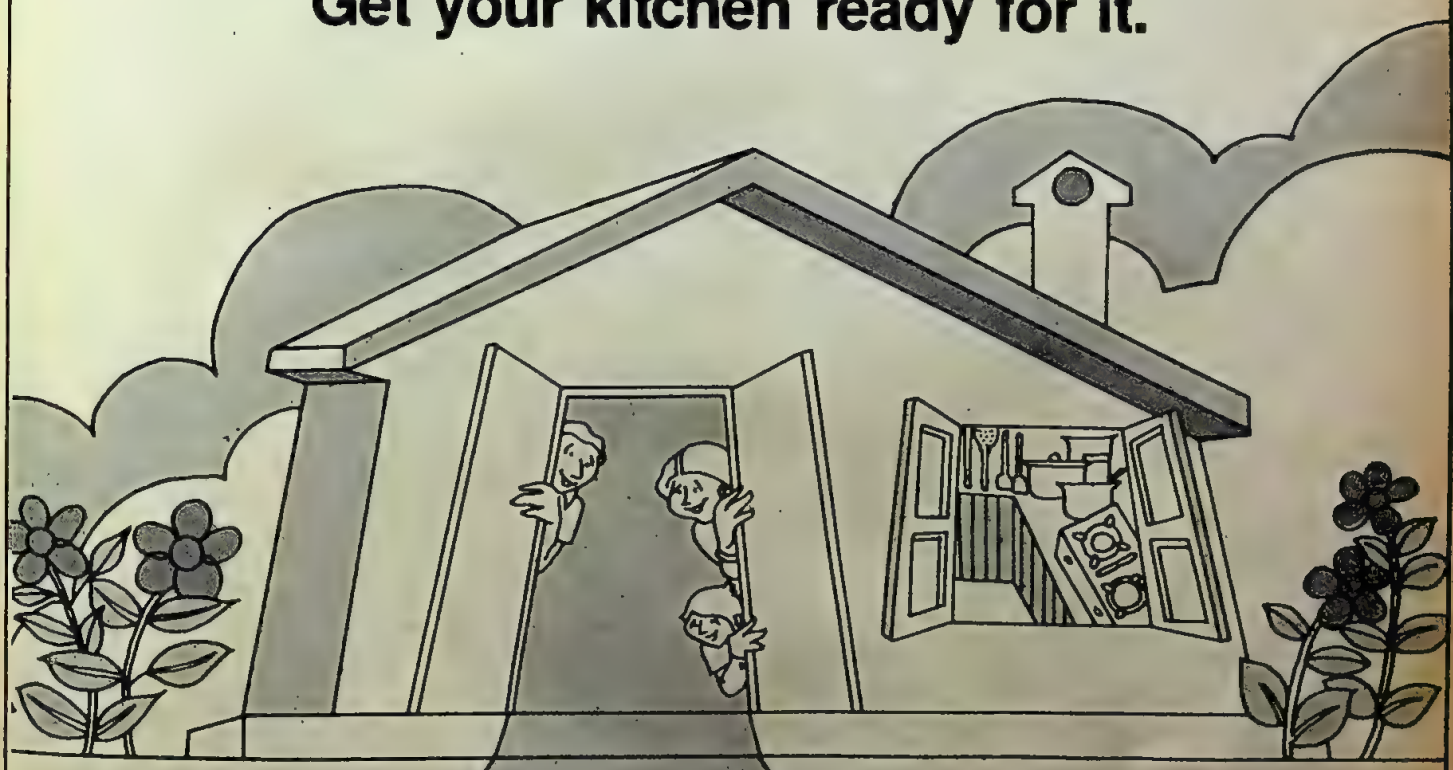
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ENERGETIC FORAY

JK SYNTHETICS, the high-flying star of the Singhania group, is planning a major foray into non-conventional sources of energy. The company has got the Government's clearance for turning out wind-power equipment with an annual capacity of 50 mw, in collaboration with Polenko of Holland and is setting up a demonstration unit in Gujarat. It is also planning to install facilities in Delhi and elsewhere for generating electricity out of city garbage, and has a Rs 10 crore solar energy project on the anvil. The company also intends to expand quickly in its existing areas of operation, doubling its million-tonne cement capacity, and setting up new projects to produce more acrylic fibre, polyester staple fibre and polyester filament yarn. These projects, with a total investment bill of around Rs 180 crore, are expected to take the company's turnover from Rs 350 crore this year to around Rs 800 crore in the next three years. Other JK group companies (which are celebrating the birth centenary of group founder Kamlapat Singhania this month) are also planning to expand their cement capacities in such a manner that the group as a whole will soon be next only to the Birlas in the cement industry.

INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT

THE INTERNATIONALISATION of Indian investment companies took a major step forward last month when the Bombay-based Champaklal Investment and Financial Consultancy Company (CIFCO) decided to join up with Hill Samuel, the British merchant banking company, to float the (CIFCO) Hill Samuel Unit Fund. The new venture proposes to raise at least $ 5 million (Rs 6 crore) in short order, with some of this money proposed to be invested in India. But the bulk of the money raised will be invested abroad. A large number of non-resident Indians are expected to be attracted by the new company's units. Earlier, Ashok Birla had been proposing to tie up with another British merchant bank, S.G. Warburg, to tap non-resident Indian and other foreign funds.

TEXAN TIES

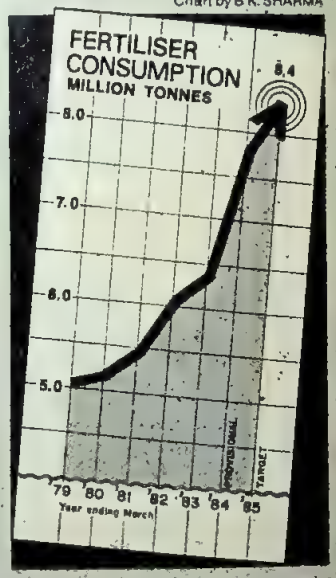
THE TEXAN firm, Branham Industries, has tied up an arrangement with the public sector Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) for building derricks and rigs in India, for supply to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL). Initially, Branham is shipping out the bulk of the equipment from its British subsidiary, but gradual Indianisation will then follow. BHEL had diversified into oil-drilling and production equipment some years ago, but initially faced some problems over the design and quality of its equipment. These have however been straightened out.

AMERICAN ODYSSEY

FIRST it was Vikram Lal of Eicher Goodearth running a tractor company in West Germany. Then, it was Enfield India being presented with the opportunity of taking charge of a motorcycle company, also in West Germany. Now it is the turn of the Birlas to extend their field of industrial operations to the United States. S.K. Birla has taken over a Chicago-based subsidiary of Hunt-Wessen Inc which has the capacity to produce 350 million pounds of edible oils. The company has been given the name-tag Universal Edible Oil Inc. The deal involved parting with Rs 5 crore, but the total investment is expected to be Rs 15 crore. The money is being raised from Birla companies abroad and from non-resident Indians.

IMPORTING TROUBLE

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



THE FERTILISER industry has just been through a boom period, but trouble could be in store if the Government goes through with its plans to undertake large-scale imports this year. Consumption jumped last year by 22 per cent to 7.8 million tonnes, the biggest increase since the 1977-78 increase of 26 per cent. In fact, the increase in quantitative terms was more last year than in the previous four years together, and contributed to the record harvest of 151 million tonnes. This year, the Government expects consumption to hit 8.4 million tonnes. Fertiliser manufacturers argue that excessive imports based on overestimates of consumption will hit domestic production.

UNPLANNED CONSTRAINTS

THE SEVENTH Five-Year Plan, due to be launched next April, has already run into trouble, with the financial calculations showing a mammoth resource gap of close to Rs 40,000 crore (which is 22 per cent of the total size of the Rs 180,000 crore public sector outlay proposed), and revised calculations showing a deterioration on the foreign payments front. As a result, the balance of payments could emerge as a major constraint. Further, economists consulted by the Planning Commission have expressed their doubts on several scores: the assumption that the savings rate will hit 26 per cent (from around 22 per cent now), that agriculture can grow at the rate of 4 per cent, and that inflation can be brought down to 5 per cent annually from double that level now. Yet another subject of questioning concerns the assumed population growth rate of 1.83 per cent, compared to 2.2 per cent during the last decade.

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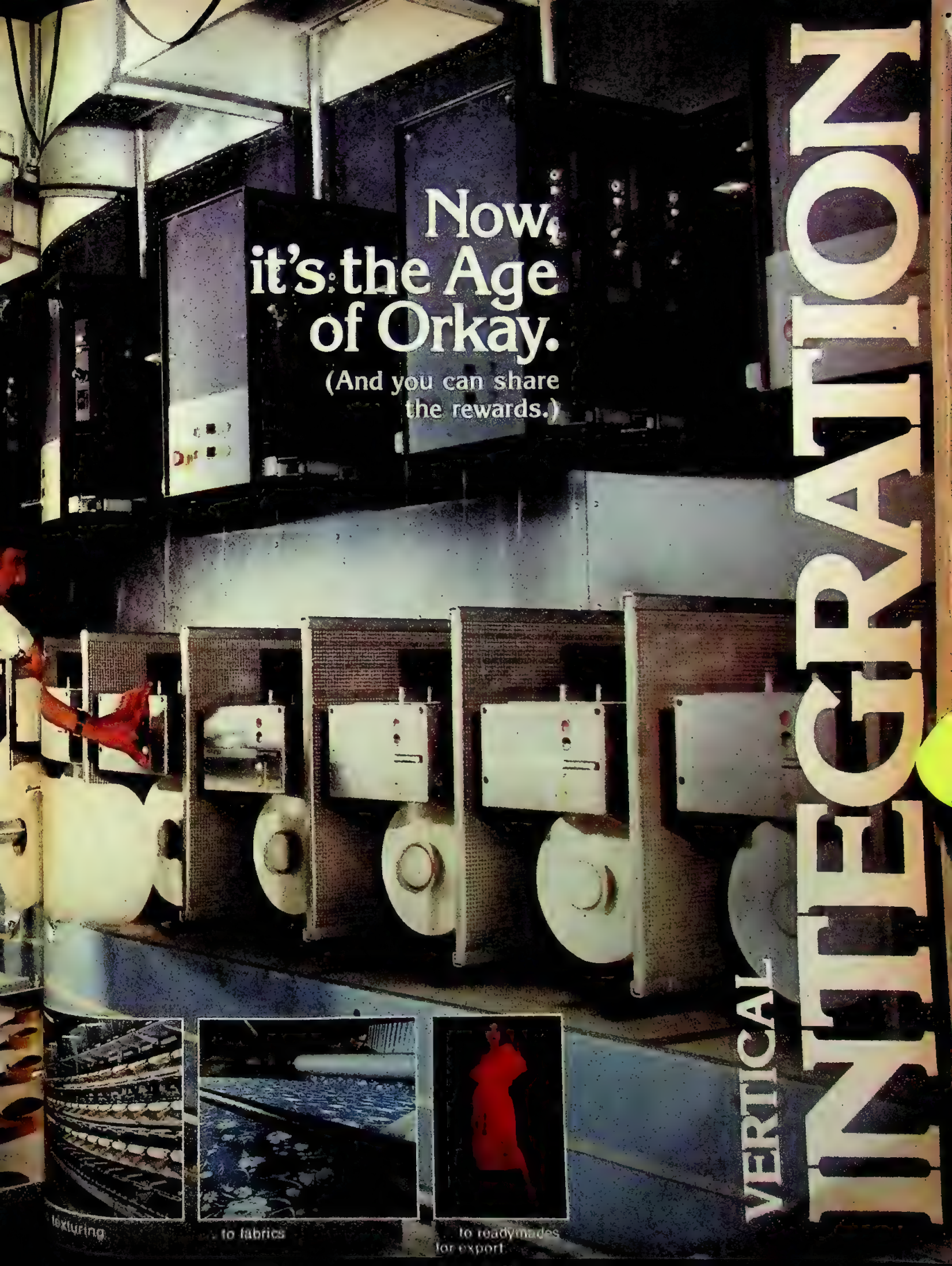
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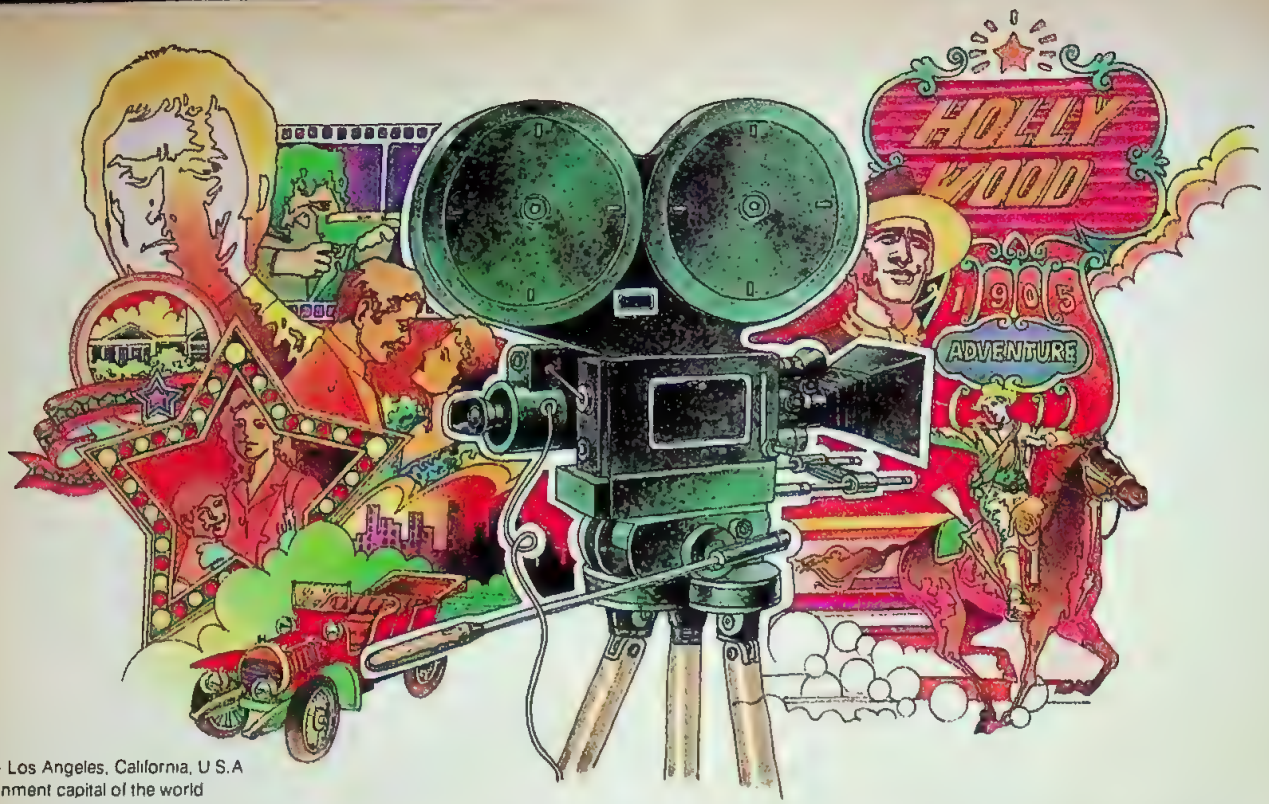
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ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The Numbers Game



ARE INDIANS better off than they were five or six years ago when the Janata was in power? It is the kind of question voters ask themselves when they go to the polling booth. Mrs Gandhi fired the first shot when she recently asked her audience in Patna to compare her performance with that of the opposition parties when they were in power. She meant of course economic performance, not the political one, though the economy of a country is as complex an affair as its polity, and straightforward comparisons are not always possible.

The same question was asked half-way through the second year of the Janata government and I did a piece in this magazine (INDIA TODAY, January 15, 1979) in which the conclusion—if you can really call it that—was that going by the gross national product (GNP) alone, the economy under Janata had done twice as well as during the Emergency, although this would be far too simplistic an interpretation. Actually, if other indicators are taken into account, there was not much to choose between the first 20 months of Janata and the first 20 months of the Emergency, and both seemed to have lost on the roundabouts what they gained on the swings. It was a surprising conclusion considering that the two periods were so entirely different in other ways, but also not all that different since it is now generally accepted on all sides that nothing really changes much in India and the country goes on more or less as before, irrespective of which mahout is riding the elephant. Elephants have a reputation of going their own way, mahout or no mahout.

Have things changed since 1979? I have been looking at the figures but the two periods are not really comparable, for agriculture plays a big part in the Indian economy and a drought, or a bumper harvest, can make or mar the best laid plans of mice and men. We can, however, take the first two years of Janata (1977-78 and 1978-79) and the first two years of Congress(I) (1980-81 and 1981-82) which were rather normal years, the ups and downs in foodgrain production being almost similar. The first year of the Janata saw a recovery from the drought in the preceding year in much the same way as the first year of Mrs Gandhi's Government followed a similar though rather bigger drought in the previous year.

Once again, going by the two broad indicators, GNP and industrial production, there is not much to choose between the two. GNP rose by 14.6 per cent during the two-year Janata period and by 13.1 per cent in the corresponding Congress(I) period. Industrial production rates were 10.9 and 12.6 respectively, more or less the same. There is, however, a tremendous difference when you come to prices. As every housewife remembers, prices were really held in check during those Janata days, the rise in the first two years being no more than 5 per cent, or about 2.5 per cent a year, which in these days of double-digit inflation, is a fleabite. In fact, during the first Janata year, prices rose by a third of 1 per cent, a rate that has not been equalled since. In the corresponding Congress(I) period, wholesale prices rose 19 per cent, or nearly four times the Janata rate.

The country goes on irrespective of which mahout is riding the elephant. Elephants have a reputation of going their own way, mahout or no mahout.

The Janata period was moderate in most things. Imports went up by 32 per cent as against 46 per cent under Congress(I). Exports were also moderate, 11 per cent, against 20 per cent under Congress(I). Why prices should have risen so much in the face of heavy imports is one of those mysteries that has never been solved. The effect on foreign exchange reserves was immediate. They went up by 82 per cent under Janata but came down sharply by 35 per cent under Congress(I). In fact, foreign exchange reserves reached a peak figure of Rs 5,220 crore in March 1979 and have been coming down ever since, despite the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other loans.

But this is not the whole story. To be fair to the Congress(I), we should examine whether the country is economically better off today than five years earlier. This is not an easy question to answer for there are always ifs and buts and even in countries like the United States where statistics come off the computers like popcorn, and there is generally an answer to every question. President Reagan's critics say that if you are wealthy, you are better off; if you are middle income, you are about where you were and if you are of moderate income, you are worse off than you were four years ago.

Things are probably not all that different in India. I have a hunch that in our country too, the wealthy and the upper middle class are better off, the middle classes about the same, but the poor are certainly worse off than in 1980.

There is something of a mini-boom in industry fuelled by the high rate of savings and the loans that we have taken from abroad and this is reflected in the spate of equity and debenture issues as also in the large array of new products flooding the market. Businessmen may complain of this industry and that not doing well, and of high interest rates and the Government's tight money policies, but they know they have never had it so good. There are probably twice as many five-star hotels than there were five years ago, always a sensitive indicator of income transfers in the economy. Rajiv Gandhi is reported to have said that people were demanding airports instead of kerosene, though he didn't say which people he was referring to. But he is quite right. Money talks and the very fact that it talks of airports and five-star hotels is an indication of where that money is located.

On the other hand, while the poor may not be getting poorer, they are not getting richer either. It would be impossible for them to ride out of poverty at the rate incomes and prices are moving. The consumer price index has gone up by 50 per cent since Mrs Gandhi came to power and it is unlikely that incomes have kept pace with inflation at anywhere near this rate. About this time seven years ago, sugar was Rs 2 a kg, ghee Rs 23 a kg and good quality wheat Rs 2 a kg. People remember these prices even when they have forgotten everything else. In a country like India where nearly two-thirds of families are outside the organised sector, progress is likely to be judged by what is known as the misery index—inflation plus unemployment—but it is not the only index the average voter goes by. He has his own perception of how the economy is doing and it may be totally at variance with that of the experts who are often apt to add two and two and say four, though there are times when this is not always so. Man doesn't live by numbers alone.

FOREIGN LOANS

Banking on India

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be"—from Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

POLONIUS never got it right, just as he never got so many other things right. There are times, though, when his prudent if too conservative counsel seems to have its own logic as in the case of 20th century Latin America now billions of dollars in debt and ironically enough, likely to attract more money from banks desperate to ensure that their huge investments made in the first, second and third flush of funds and optimism are secured. But there are also countries to whom the stick-in-the-mud advice of the prattling courtier does not apply and India, if not at the top of the list, is very near the top with credentials that positively glitter in a world riddled with bad loans: a track record of prompt debt servicing, a more or less stable political system and an economy which has managed to get along steadily.

The banks, of course, have known of this dream customer for a long time. However, with the Government of India's long-standing emphasis on cheap funds—read development funds from the World Bank and other such munificent agencies—they have not had much occasion to sell their wares. However, the munificent agencies of late have become positively scrooge-like and have begun to argue that India should go in for commercial borrowing in a big way. India hasn't taken the bait resolutely, but western banks have been trooping to India in search of business.

India, cautiously, has been responding. In 1981-82 Rs 1,200 crore came to India in the form of foreign currency loans. In 1982-83 that figure shot up to Rs 2,025 crore, Central Government and the public sector alone borrowing over Rs 1,500 crore. The figure for 1983-84 is lower but still as high as Rs 1,082 crore. There is undoubtedly feverish activity on the foreign currency front. Last month the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) borrowed $300 million from a syndicate led by Chase Manhattan. NALCO could be said to have sparked off the current spate of borrowing with its 1981 loan of $ 680 million, also raised by a Chase-led syndicate of 40 banks. Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited has taken $50 million, Maruti Udyog $75 million, Reliance Textiles $16 million, Bajaj Auto $22 million, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited $30 million. The Tata Iron and Steel Company is reported to be next in line for an unspecified sum, as is Great Eastern for $12 million. Says N.A. Soonawala director of Tata Industries, "A few years ago, less than a dozen banks would offer us money when we went out to shop. Now there are a score and over who've said they are interested, with more inquiries still coming in."

Where there is money there will be money-lenders, and increasing numbers of foreign banks from the West as well as from the East are making a beeline for India.

The lion's share of the foreign currency borrowings is taken by the public sector, led by NALCO and the Oil and Natural Gas Commission. Between April 1983 and July 1984, according to one count, 15 public sector companies and financial institutions raised Rs 690 crore or around 50 per cent.

Where there is money, there will be the money-lenders and increasing numbers of foreign banks, from the West as well as from the East, are making a beeline for India. The oldest in the country is the Banque Indosuez which opened its doors 140 years ago, followed by the Chartered Bank and Grindlays, 126 and 121 years old respectively. However, by 1969 there were still only 12 foreign banks in India. For the next 11 years no new foreign bank came in but in 1980 their number had gone up to 17 and in less than a year 10 more were clamouring for licences—three from the UAE, two from the United States, and one each from Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Canada and France, the latest bank to open a branch being the Bank of Nova Scotia. Apart from these, there are a dozen representative offices of such powerful leaders in the loan brigade as Chemical Bank, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company and Chase Manhattan Bank. Says Sudheer Desai, vice-president and country manager, South Asia, of Chase: "India has come of age as a major chart."

So far, the terms have been good. The NALCO loan for instance was worked out in two portions. The first of $100 million, a tax-sparing portion with an interest of one half per cent over the London Inter-Bank Offered Rate (LIBOR) and the second and conventional portion of $200 million at three eighths per cent over LIBOR. Both foreign and Indian bankers agree that such rates are among the most favourable available. The money market is a highly heterogenous one as far as interest rates are concerned. In India, the current rate is around 16 per cent. Abroad, each currency has its own price tag and the tags differ wildly. On one day last month, the dollar was available at nearly 12 per cent, the pound for 10.5 per

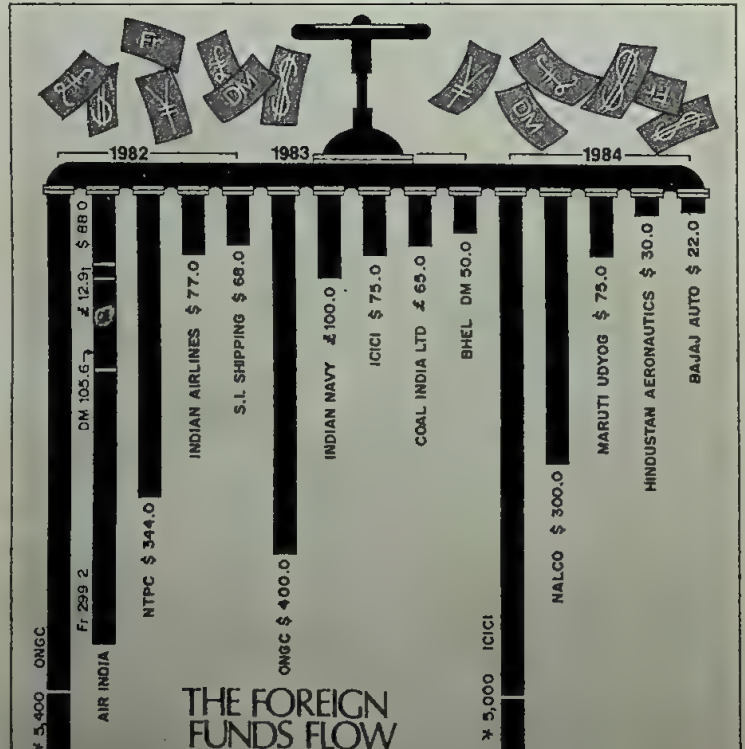


Chart by B.K SHARMA

cent, the Deutsche mark for slightly over 6 per cent, the yen for about 6.5 per cent and the French franc for nearly 13 per cent. The cheapest currency was the Swiss franc, which was available for 5.25 per cent. Obviously, borrowing foreign currency is attractive. Not so obviously, borrowing dollars becomes necessary because firstly there are a lot of them around—the Eurodollar market is sizeable—and secondly because the market is limited for other currencies. The reason for the sudden interest in India is as much India's high credit rating abroad as the fact that with so many banks sniffing around for a piece of the action, competition will necessarily keep the rates down. As a senior official of one of the biggest Indian banks comments: "For the time being the foreign banks' greed to do business will ensure that the money they lend is cheaper."



If the statement contains more than a hint of jealousy, that is understandable. Indian bank officials freely admit that they cannot possibly compete with their foreign counterparts. Says P.V.V.K. Rao, deputy general manager, International, of the Bank of Baroda: "The only competition for foreign banks at present is foreign banks. The only restraint in their functioning is riper resource mobilisation. Otherwise they can go wherever they choose, without the market handicap of having to fund priority sectors such as Indian banks have." Also Indian banks and institutions just do not have access to the volume of funds that the huge American banks can put up: "The average size of an Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) loan for instance is $1 million, which is a small change for somebody like Citibank."

However, there does not seem to have been any major opposition to the fresh barge of foreign banks into India. Since Indian banks have been expanding abroad in bigger numbers, the principle of reciprocity has prompted the Reserve Bank of India to allow others to come in.

Why are foreign banks in India? Despite the fact that Indian credit as a whole is excellent, that India can absorb a lot more dollars, according to not so conservative estimates the working conditions in the country are not very congenial. The restrictive controls and poor communications apart, the effective tax rate for wholly foreign banks in India is as high as 82 per cent. According to James Schlagheck, senior vice-president and regional manager for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan of American Express, they are interested in India because they hope that controls will ease in the future, because India wants to step up exports and they see greater possibilities of export financing, because of the consumer boom in India and the expansion of the market.

Since Indian banks have been expanding abroad in bigger numbers, the principle of reciprocity has prompted the Reserve Bank of India to allow others to come in.

ANOTHER excellent reason is the margins. In the heated world of deposits and loans abroad, the margins are very thin and afford large profits only on substantial volume. In India, however, the margins are often quite large and hence are very lucrative. Explains S. Srikanth, regional representative of the Bankers Trust Company: "We operate in the West on margins which are no more than an eighth of a per cent. Here we can take advantage of the margins 10 times that." Other foreign bankers, however, dispute that effective profit margins in India are higher because of the high tax rates.

Nevertheless, the banks are here to stay, even if it is only as a man on the spot with a briefcase. So far there has been just one drop-out, Wells Fargo of the United States, which opened a representative office in Bombay but downed shutters within a year of opening them, allegedly because of high costs. As if to prevent any more such casualties the RBI has been encouraging 'agency' relationships, where a local firm acts as the agent for a foreign bank.

That the RBI has smiled benevolently on this and similar tie-ups is a measure of the cordial relations between international banking and the powers that be in India and also the realisation that for India funding will not be as easy to find as before. As an RBI official puts it, "We have to live with these fellows. And we hope that besides bringing in the dollars they will also bring some of that high-tech expertise."

There are also reports that the foreign banks are being gently persuaded to enter fields other than trading which has so far been their forte. Foreign bank branches in India deal mostly with non-fund transactions like guarantees, letters of credit and so on, where risks are low and margins comparatively high—no wonder that they are 25 per cent more profitable than Indian banks, although there is no move as yet to push them into priority sector financing. "The obvious reason for this," comments a senior official of a nationalised bank drily, "is that if they are ordered into what are essentially loss-making activities they will go away."

But as always, the bottom line looms large in the flurry of loans given and loans taken. For the moment, however, with the Government keeping tight control on the transactions—the yearly 'budget' for them is about $1 billion—there is absolutely no fear of India becoming the black hole for money that the Latin American countries have become.

That is just as well. Last fortnight, RBI Governor Dr Manmohan Singh said that Indian exports had to grow at around 6 per cent a year to enable it to service its debts. Again last fortnight, first projections by the Planning Commission showed that exports could grow at an annual rate of 5.4 per cent during the Seventh Five Year Plan period if the current trend continued. So there is no room for complacency on the loans front and for some time to come caution will definitely be the watchword.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

DCM

Clearing the Heir

THE BATTLE for succession in DCM is almost over. One last round remains to be fought, in the closing days of October, and a great deal could hinge on that. But the new look of the Rs 500-crore company's strife-ridden top management is already discernible. And the one clear loser on the battlefield is Charat Ram, who is being asked to leave the company against his will.

Both the present managing directors, Bharat Ram, 70, and younger brother Charat Ram, 67, will make way for the next generation in the Shri Ram family next April, when their present tenures end. Stepping into their shoes will be Bansi Dhar, nephew of the present managing directors and currently joint managing director, and Vinay Bharat Ram, who is Bharat Ram's oldest son and now deputy managing director in the company.

This fits pretty closely with the succession plan that Bharat Ram had proposed (INDIA TODAY, October 31), but with one rider: it is still not certain what the two new incumbents will be designated. At the crucial meeting of the company's board of directors on October 18, Bansi Dhar strongly opposed Vinay Bharat Ram's promotion to the status of a full managing director, suggesting instead that he be designated joint managing director. The final decision on this is expected in late October, and could pose last minute disputes and problems.

So far, however, Bharat Ram has pretty much had his way, with the majority on the company board (including the three nominees of the financial institutions) agreeing with him on key issues. Both Charat Ram and Bansi Dhar had proposed, for instance, that there should be only one managing director in the company, so that the disputes at the top would come to an end. But the board refused to go along. So despite the opposition from two of the four family members involved, the succession could eventually turn out to be the "orderly transition" that Bharat Ram had planned.

Bansi Dhar had also said during the meeting that if he was to be elevated to the top spot in the company, neither Bharat Ram nor Charat Ram should continue on the board as even non-executive directors. Their presence on the board, he had argued, would hamper his own freedom to run the company in the manner he thought best. But the board thought otherwise, and decided that both the present managing directors would stay on as non-executive members of the board.

The only bright spot for Charat Ram in an otherwise bleak scenario is that his second son, Siddharth Shri Ram, who is now managing director of Shri Ram Refrigerations, will soon be inducted into DCM as deputy managing director. Bansi Dhar had also indicated that he would have no objection to Vinay Bharat Ram's place being taken by either of his two younger brothers, Arun and Vivek, but this was not seriously considered.



Vinay Bharat Ram

At the crucial meeting of the company's board of directors Bansi Dhar strongly opposed Vinay Bharat Ram's promotion to the status of a full managing director, suggesting instead that he be designated joint managing director.

Bansi Dhar



HARI OM GULATI

The board meeting, close to the Diwali season, was not therefore without its share of fireworks. Soon after the meeting convened at 11 a.m. in the company's head office in Delhi, the board decided to ask six of the 14 directors to leave. Two were those nominated by the company's workers and officers, and the other four were the Shri Ram family members involved. This was proposed so that the succession issue could be debated impartially, without those concerned being present.

But Bansi Dhar requested an opportunity to speak his mind on the issue, and the board heard him for more than half an hour. The company's joint managing director said that Charat Ram's proposal that he be appointed chairman and managing director for three years should be accepted. Failing that, he said he would accept the post of managing director, but an external chairman should be brought in—someone like B.K. Nehru, A.N. Haksar, or K.B. Lall. But Bharat Ram vetoed this soon enough. Bansi Dhar's second submission was that Vinay Bharat Ram's track record did not warrant his being promoted to a full managing director. Charat Ram had already submitted a note on this issue, passing some caustic comments on Vinay Bharat Ram's managerial record. But in a written rejoinder that was almost as sharp, Vinay Bharat Ram had said that while one uncle (Bharat Ram) was graciously passing on the number one spot to his nephew (Bansi Dhar), a second uncle (Charat Ram) was casting aspersions on another nephew (himself).

When his turn came to speak, Vinay Bharat Ram also said that his track record justified his promotion, and that anything less than the designation of a full managing director would not be acceptable to him. The board went along with this, but in an effort to work out a compromise suggested that while Vinay Bharat Ram would be called managing director, Bansi Dhar would be designated senior managing director. Bansi Dhar, however, argued that this was meaningless, and a deadlock was averted only by deciding that Bansi Dhar would be chairman and chief executive officer, and that Vinay Bharat Ram would report to him, but that their precise designations would be determined later.

If there is no agreement on designations at the board's next meeting, it is just conceivable that Bharat Ram will propose an extension of the status quo. But the more likely sequence of events is that Bharat Ram's succession plan will be accepted in toto, and a new duo installed in office next April.

—T.N. NINAN

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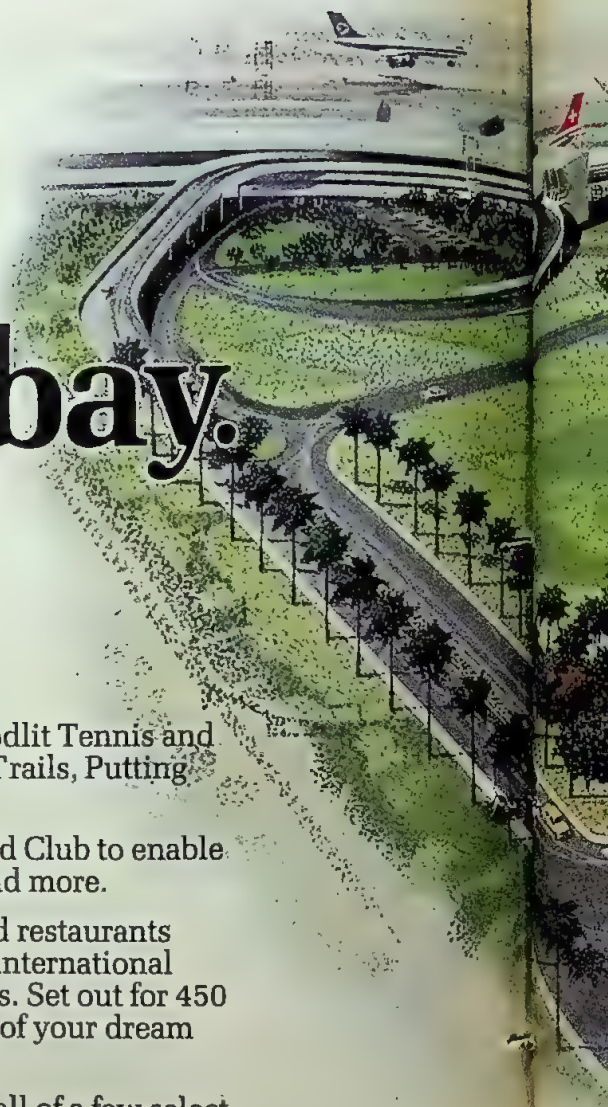


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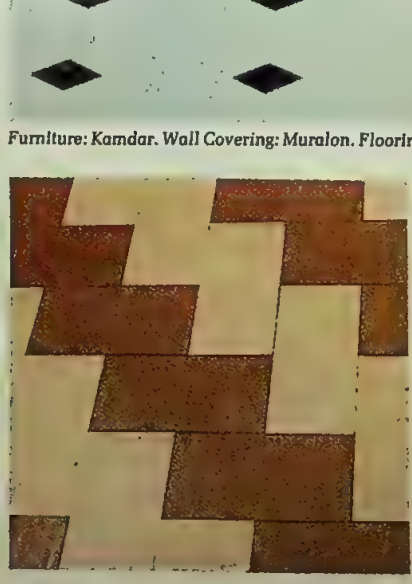
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OBM/3970

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Towards Liberalisation

THE SIGNALS have been evident for months; yet another pillar in the Government's industrial policy edifice is about to be hauled down. A government committee is examining the question of doing away with the reigning regime of physical controls on the private sector and replacing it with a system of financial rewards and punishments, to be administered by the financial institutions, and another committee has handed in a report suggesting what would have been unthinkable a few years ago—the creation of a privileged, brahminical class of export-geared industries which would include big business and foreign controlled companies. These measures will cap a series of tentative steps taken by the Government since July 1980 down the liberalisation road. And underpinning the liberalisations in the pipeline is the logic that more of the same medicine is called for.

But the 1980 package of concessions has not borne full fruit. D.H. Pai Panandikar, secretary general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), echoes a belief widely held in the private sector when he says: "Merely diddling around here and there with the control mechanism will not help. Small concessions will lead to small results." And the Committee of Perspective Plan and Strategy for Export of Engineering and Capital Goods, headed by heavy industry secretary D.V. Kapur, notes in its recently submitted report: "Quantum jumps in the fields of exports in general, and engineering goods exports in particular, have not taken place in spite of measures taken by the Government over the past few years to liberalise and streamline policies."

Those measures included: exemption from licencing and Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act restrictions for export production; a wide spectrum of facilities for companies set up solely to export goods they produce; official blessing for a five per cent automatic growth in capacity, subject to a maximum of 25 per cent over a five-year period, for a large number of industries; regularising capacity set up in excess of licenced or registered capacity by companies operating in 34 industries whose products are classified as "core" or mass consumption items; permission for companies to add 33.3 per cent to capacity over and above their peak production level in any of the past five years; heftier incentives for companies that invest in industryless and backward districts; and an enlarged list of areas open to large industrial houses and subsidiaries of multinational corporations. Moreover, tax incentives for merging sick companies with healthy ones were made more easily available, the ceiling for exempting investment in industrial projects from licencing was upped from Rs 3 crore to Rs 5 crore, and applications for foreign collaborations were treated more sympathetically.

This array of concessions is impressive

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



by any yardstick, but the big question now is whether they have worked. The liberalisations were meant to spur capacity utilisation in industry, maximise output, correct regional industrial imbalances by spreading investment more equitably in geographic terms, and to promote export-oriented industries. The evidence, as FICCI's Pai Panandikar and the D.V. Kapur report suggest, is that, overall, the concessions have met with moderate to poor results.

On the credit side of the ledger is the upgrading of technology that is going on in the economy, especially in the engineering industry. The number of foreign collaboration agreements approved by the Government since 1980 climbed by over 27 per cent last year, nearly all of them for technology and most of them for the engineering industry, and chambers of commerce and industry have been scouting for knowhow abroad. In the latest such foray, a high-level Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry delegation led by Assocham president M.S. Patwardan heads for the United Kingdom next month in search of technical collaboration agreements. Explains D.N. Saxena, the organisation's secretary general: "This is partly the upshot of the Government having liberalised technology imports."

There are more items in black ink on the ledger. The number of industrial licences issued by the Government for fresh industrial investment, has shot up by 21 per cent between 1980 and last year; the five per cent automatic growth in capacity permitted in industries like metallurgy, electrical equipment, industrial machinery, chemicals, textiles, food processing, and drugs and pharmaceuticals has lured investors to these areas, as is reflected in the mounting numbers of licences issued for these industries and there has been a 72 per cent rise in the number of industrial licences issued to large industrial houses between 1980 and last year, testifying to the effectiveness of the Government's relaxed policy towards them.

But for all that, the debit side of the ledger is disquietingly long. Despite increased production and additional capacity having been created in the economy, overall capacity utilisation in industry has plummetted over the last four years, says the latest annual report of the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), there has been no shift towards rectifying regional industrial disparities, what with industrially better off states hogging letters of intent, and while exports have risen by 46 per cent in the last five years, the extent to which the exemption from licenced capacity granted to companies for export production had contributed to this rise is debatable. The Punjab, Haryana and Delhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in a study, points out that while industrial policy permits expansion for export production, the import policy does not allow capital goods imports if it means addition to capacity. "Therefore, the policy of licence-free production for export does not make any impact in terms of growth of export surplus," it argues.

Other constituents of the liberalisation package have fared much worse. The 100 per cent export-oriented units scheme has not made any headway, despite a range of facilities being on tap—cash compensation to offset sales tax and octroi levied on imported or domestically procured inputs, priority in power supply and the movement of goods, quick release of foreign ex-

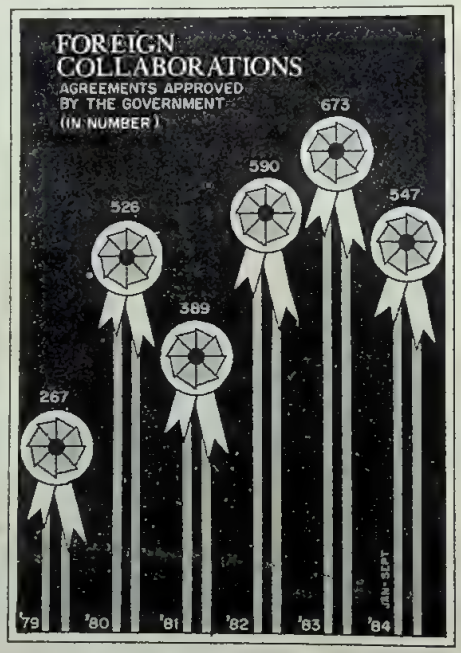
change by the Reserve Bank of India, and loans on soft terms from the financial institutions. But four years after the scheme was launched, only 42 of the 466 companies to which letters of intent have been granted were fully operational by June 1984. And the 42 are yet to make a net contribution to exports, imports of raw materials and so on of some Rs 150 crore having topped sales abroad worth Rs 120 crore by June.

SIGNIFICANTLY, just three companies, Kudremukh Iron Ore, Modi Xerographics and Nav Bharat Tobacco Company, accounted for the bulk (Rs 88 crore) of exports. While a Commerce Ministry official argues that a two-year gestation period was required and that the scheme is only now coming out of the woods, C. Balasubramanium, secretary of the Delhi-based 100 per cent Export Oriented Units Association concedes: "The figures prove that not much headway has been made." In explanation, he cites a long list of problems promoters of export-oriented companies face. But a spokesman of big business dismisses the scheme's viability on grounds that with their low-volume, high-cost production, 100 per cent export-oriented units won't survive the cut-throat competition in foreign markets and their contribution to the nation's effort can at best be peripheral.

To cap this scenario, components of the package of concessions such as the backward area and no industry district schemes, and the scheme to encourage mergers of companies in sick bay with financially healthy ones, show patchy or poor results. The number of letters of intent granted by the Government between 1980 and 1983 for industrial projects in the nation's 264 backward districts is up by 56 per cent, but most of these were for ventures in areas close to cities, says the FICCI secretary general. Confirms the IDBI's annual report: "The quantum of assistance to the backward districts which were closer to the metropolitan centres was generally higher." And industry has been largely indifferent to the incentives offered to lure it to the 90 no industry districts in the country: only 1.2 per cent of last calendar year's total number of industrial licences were awarded for projects in industryless districts though the number of applications rose. K.N. Modi, patriarch of the Modi group of companies which has set up a cement plant in Madhya Pradesh's relatively remote Raipur district, offers an explanation. The red carpet is virtually laid out for those queueing up for permission to set up ventures in no industry districts, but, he says, the costs of putting up the infrastructure outweigh the benefits. Modi Cement, for instance, has had to almost build a township from scratch to provide housing, schools and other basics to its staff. And Bansi Dhar, joint managing director of DCM Ltd, adds, "We don't believe in going to backward areas just for the short-term benefits. The long-term costs are much higher." If big business is moving to backward areas, it is assured of getting a licence.

Lastly, the aims of the scheme to merge sick companies with healthy corporate entities have remained unfulfilled. Despite the tax advantages, amounting to crores in not a few cases, interest in the scheme has waned. The number of merger applications complete in all respects submitted by companies to the Industry Ministry and involving tax benefits has tumbled from 13 in 1979 to 6 last year; the figure is likely to be only marginally higher this year. Most of the corporate marriages have been in-house affairs and their risible number in any case bears witness that the problem of sickness in industry remains untouched.

Chart by B K SHARMA



The declining interest in the mergers scheme is explained by the procedural hurdles. A merger application has to wend its way through six government bodies and a high court—a process that can take over two years.

And it is the red tape that the private sector cavils at. Assocham's Saxena points out that it took over four years for National Organic and Chemicals Ltd to obtain a letter of intent for a new project. And delays can prove expensive. K.N. Modi estimates that delays can jack-up project costs by over 20 per cent, and an industrial undertaking could wind up footing a Rs 120 crore bill for a Rs 90 crore project. Some, like Modi, in the private sector would therefore like to see quicker clearances by the Government.

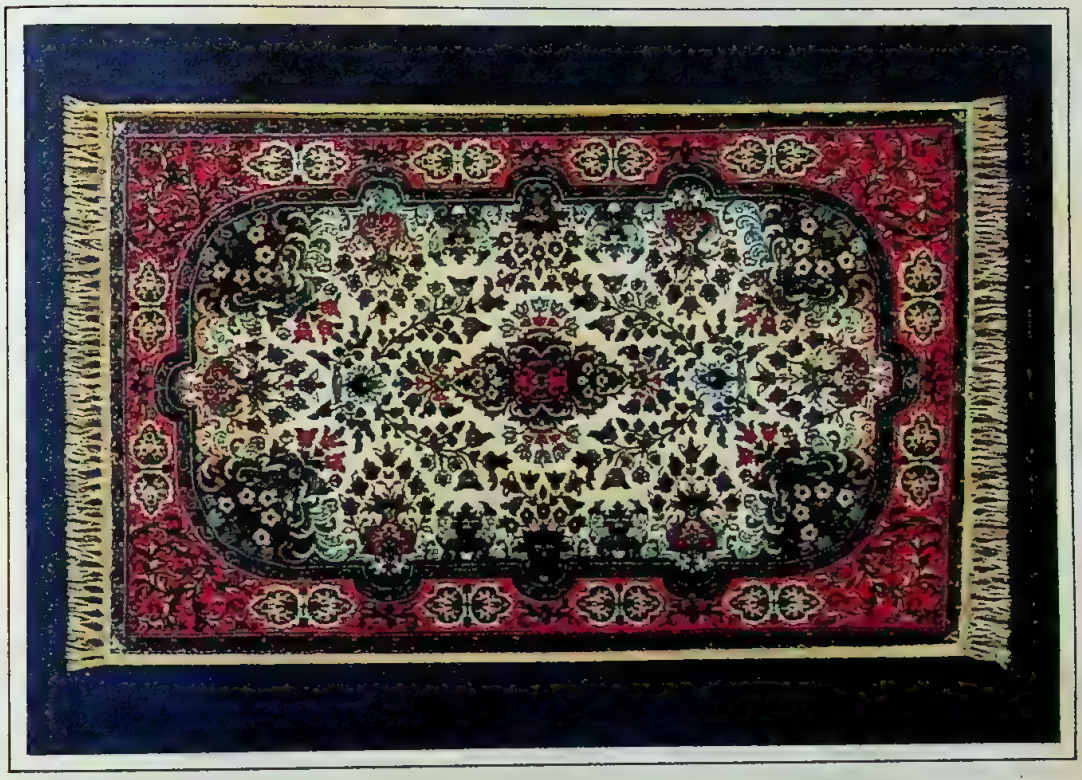
But most would like to see controls being diluted, arguing that the 1980 measures, though welcome, have not gone far enough. A Delhi-based economist describes them as "a nibbling away at con--trols", with the Government having hedged them in with many ifs and buts, almost as second thoughts. A FICCI spokesman agrees, pointing out that most of the strings attached—a 2:1 debt equity ratio for large industrial houses setting up core sector ventures and the insistence on 95 per cent capacity utilisation to be eligible for 5 per cent automatic growth when power cuts and raw material shortages reign—render the concessions meaningless. Not surprisingly, therefore, some, like Tarun Das, executive director of the Association of Indian Engineering Industries, advocates a new law in place of the basic legislation that set up the controls structure, The Industries (Development and Regulation) Act of 1951, and a reframing of the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, economist S.K. Goyal of the Indian Institute of Public Administration poohpoohs the 1980 package: "There's nothing in the concessions to show real liberalisation. But a whole ethos of liberalisation is being built. Government committees are recommending relaxations, the public sector is under attack, the Government is not sure whether the rules are good enough, companies have merrily continued to produce beyond licenced capacities, and a systematic erosion of the concept of planning is underway."

The welter of opinions merely reflects the Government's uncertainty on the liberalisation front. While with one hand it has granted concessions, with the other it has proceeded to tighten its grip on the corporate sector. The MRTP Act has been amended to redefine marketplace dominance more restrictively, a tighter company law is proposed, and a committee headed by former finance secretary M. Narasimhan has plumped for a more active role for nominees of financial institutions in company boardrooms. Plainly uncertain over which way to turn, the Government has moved simultaneously in two opposite directions—in the process satisfying neither the private sector nor the critics of its liberalisation endeavours.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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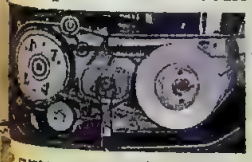
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A Peugeot-designed flap-valve engine gives you 33% fuel economy and a top speed of 60 kmph.

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4. A unique self-starting option lets you start up at the touch of a button.



Sportif's special self-starting mechanism is powered by a DC motor with a 12 volt magneto-charged battery. Just press a button and the engine comes alive.

If you'd rather pedal start, that's another option. However, Sportif's standard fixture will be a kick starter. So, all in all, you get a never-before choice of one, two or three starting options.

5. Tough, good looking mag wheels give a smoother ride while keeping your maintenance costs low.



Sportif is fitted with stylish mag wheels made from cold-rolled steel sheets. Extremely tough, easy and economical to maintain, these specially designed wheels are made up in sections. So, if you damage your wheel rim in an accident, you don't have to replace the whole wheel. However, if you prefer to have standard spoke wheels, the superbike can be fitted with them.

6. A polypropylene anti-pilferage petrol tank that's completely corrosion and rust proof shows the fuel level at a glance.

Built with a cover made of tough ABS, Sportif's petrol tank has a special tamper



proof locking system. When you unlock the cover, an indicating tube shows you the fuel level at a glance. And, being made of polypropylene, the tank is completely rust and corrosion proof.

7. The latest in exterior graphics combines stylish French looks with comfort and toughness.

The superbike's body styling is of the very latest French design. Its body sides are mounted on a sturdy centre frame, while the mouldings and pressed components are fabricated for extra toughness. Heavy duty shock absorbers take the roughest bumps with ease.

8. Specially designed, high power lighting gives you better visibility on dark roads.



Sportif's square, 16 watt twin filament headlight, with a dip-dim attachment, disperses light better than other bikes. It also has indicator lights and 6 volt, rear and brake lights. These lights are powered by a star connected magneto with a built-in transformer to take voltage surges.

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The superbike's contour seating, with high quality foam, gives just the right cushioning support for two. What's more, its silencer has an extra cover that protects your pillion's feet from touching the hot muffler.

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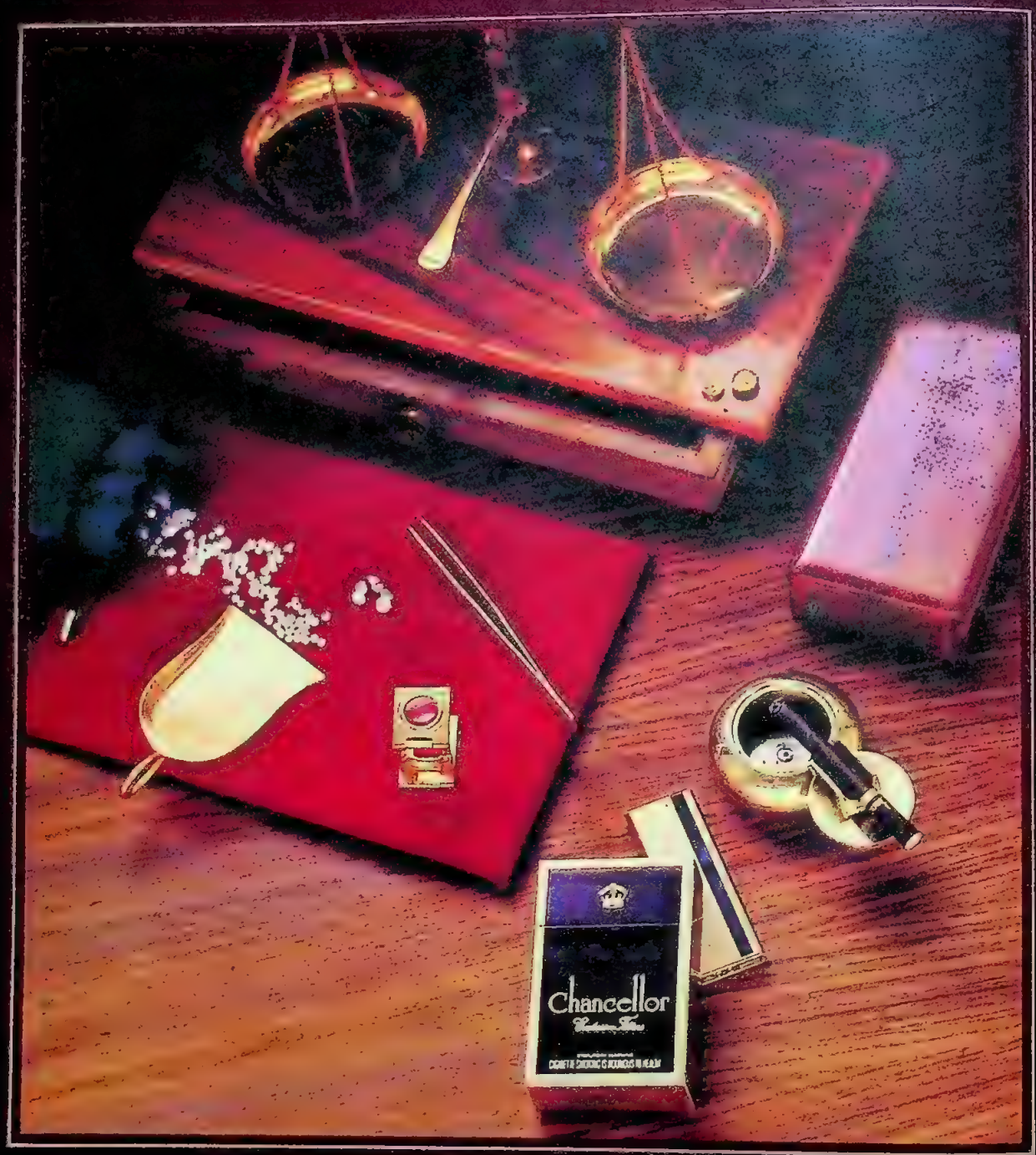
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SHAW WALLACE

Controlling Interests

WHEN share prices of the liquor giant Shaw Wallace sky-rocketed at the Calcutta stock exchange last fortnight, it looked as if the hunter had turned the hunted. Hardly a week before the raid on the company's shares set the stock-market humming, Shaw Wallace was making news by its aggressive bids to gobble up Calcutta Chemicals, the makers of Neem toothpaste and other consumer products. But all that was quickly eclipsed by the news of shadowy investors lapping up Shaw Wallace equities at any price from the market. Obviously, reasoned stock-market speculators, some big fish was after the liquor giant.

The initial hubbub over the stock-market developments dropped to a murmur as Shaw Wallace's share price slid from a record Rs 99 to Rs 92, prompting company secretary Aloke De to remark: "Trading in a few thousand shares can hardly be considered significant considering we have Rs 60 lakh shares". All the same, Shaw Wallace insiders are convinced that speculation could not be behind the spectacular ascent of the company's share prices from about Rs 50 in a couple of months. But just who is the big fish nobody can guess.

"Getting the Government's approval for acquiring a Monopolies and Restricted Trade Practices (MRTP) company like Shaw Wallace isn't a joke," says De, referring to the MRTP Act's latest provisions that came into effect from August: currently anyone buying equities in an MRTP company has to get clearance from the commission. Besides, if Shaw Wallace's parent company, the Malaysian Sime Darby, agrees to disinvest its 30 per cent holding, no Indian can hope to corner controlling interest in it. The stock-market grapevine has, however, been bandying names like Mallya, the Chettiars and the ubiquitous non-resident Indian. All that is certain is that four Madras-based companies belonging to G.Venkateshwaran, son of a film tycoon, have picked up 38,000 shares, which adds up to less than one per cent of the company's total shares.

Shaw Wallace, on the other hand, has been far more successful in cornering its prey: Calcutta Chemicals. The big break came recently. Rekha Dasgupta, a director of Calcutta Chemicals who, along with her son, owned about 22 per cent of the company's equity, finally decided to surrender her ailing company to Shaw Wallace in August this year. Initially 10 per cent of her holdings were transferred in favour of two Shaw Wallace nominees, Gouri Shanker Kalyan (Calcutta) and Chaggan Lal Naik (Calcutta). Subsequently, the remaining shares were also transferred, according to Calcutta Chemicals insiders.

Shaw Wallace officially holds only about 23.35 per cent of Calcutta Chemicals' equity through three of its wholly-owned subsidiaries, Cruickshank and Company, Shaw Wallace Gelatins, and Maharashtra Distilleries. Another 5 per cent of the company's stock is held by Bhupendra Champaklal Dalal (Bombay) and Pakshi Raj Investments Pvt. Ltd. (Madras), both of whom are alleged to be nominees of Shaw Wallace. "These investors would not have picked up Rs 19 shares at more than Rs 30 for themselves, and that too of a company that has been suffering staggering losses," said K.D. Paul who controls 28 per cent of Calcutta Chemicals' equity.

PRABUDDA BOSE



Paul: a matter of commitment

Paul, who also owns the eastern region's largest consumer products distribution agency having a turnover of Rs 50 crore per annum, used the very MRTP provisions which might one day provide Shaw Wallace a shield against a predator to stall the liquor giant. "When I found Mrs Rekha Dasgupta adamant on letting Shaw Wallace grab Calcutta Chemicals in 1982, I was compelled to go to court," declares Paul. Shaw Wallace, which had already registered 23.4 per cent shares in its name, was forbidden from registering any further shares in its name and also from enjoying any benefits from the shares already registered. This meant it could neither exercise any voting right nor claim dividend on its investment.

Although Dasgupta has dumped her shares in favour of Shaw Wallace and supported the appointment of its two nominees—Raj Bhandari and D.K. Choudury—on the Calcutta Chemicals board, nothing can change the court's ruling pending the final resolution of the case. Only if Paul decides to withdraw the case can Shaw Wallace hope to win its elusive prize.

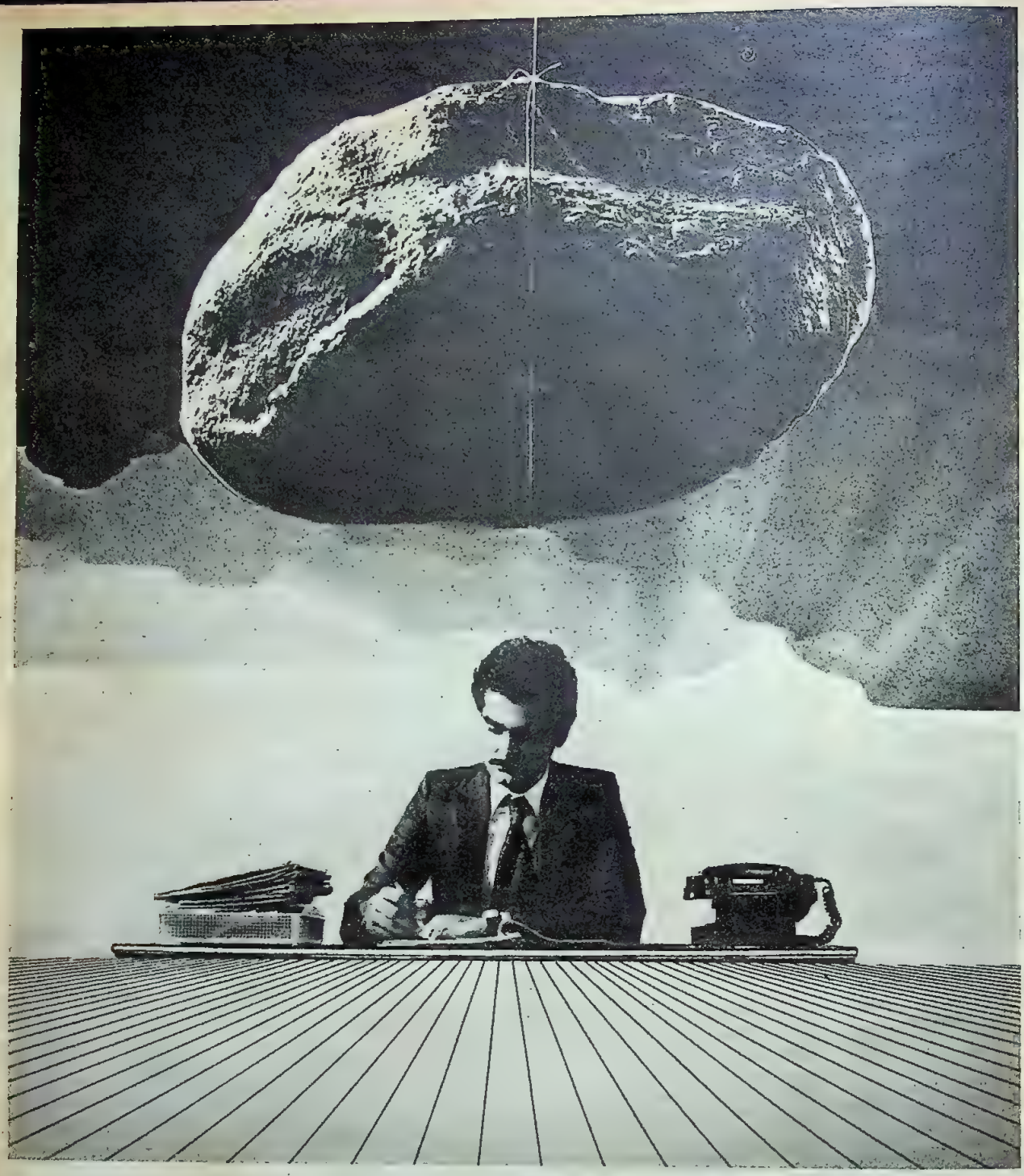
For the moment, Paul appears to be undecided: "I have been made an offer but I can always refuse". Raj Bhandari, who is believed to be the mastermind of the take-over attempt, is also non-committal: "Nothing is happening, maybe something will in the next couple of weeks."

There is no doubt that Paul himself nurtures an ambition to own the company. "I offered Mrs Rekha Dasgupta a much better price for her shares than did Shaw Wallace," says Paul. "After all what can a bureaucratic colossus like Shaw Wallace do for Calcutta Chemicals? I, as an individual, would have been totally committed," he adds. Unfortunately, a 28 per cent stake in the company does not seem enough justification for total commitment.

For Shaw Wallace, the company happens to be a crucial component in its plans of building a thriving consumer products division. It has already bought up Detergents India Ltd. and Ganga Soap factory in south India. With Calcutta Chemicals in its pocket, Shaw Wallace would have acquired the goodwill of a well-known brand name. Besides, Calcutta Chemicals, despite having chalked up over Rs 2 crore of cumulative losses in the last four years, has a wealth of fixed assets, including land in Calcutta, Madras and Siliguri.

For the moment, however, Calcutta Chemicals is not one of the priorities of the Shaw Wallace management, caught as it is between take-over threats and depressed profitability. Bijoy Roy, the acting general secretary of the All India Shaw Wallace Employees Federation, recalls Sime Darby chairman Tung Tun Siew Sin's warning three years ago at the inauguration of Shaw Wallace's Haldia unit, that his company believed in getting rid of subsidiaries making only marginal profits. Which way Shaw Wallace India will go is anybody's guess, but whether it will go or not will be known only when the company issues its latest balance sheet revealing its performance of last year.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE



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METAL BOX

Exodus at the Top

MANAGEMENT versus the unions is the usual formula for corporate headaches. At Metal Box India Limited, however, it seems to be management versus management. For the last few weeks the Calcutta-based packaging pioneer has been in the throes of a leadership crisis with over half a dozen senior executives handing in their resignations. Among them are the corporate planning manager, the chief buyer, and the regional managers in Delhi and Bombay. The reason for the spate of goodbyes is the same: the style of functioning of Managing Director Kuldip Puri, 59, who took over the top job at the problem-ridden company in April this year.

Most of the senior executives who have left Metal Box put in about 20 years of service or more, and as one put it, "You don't walk away from a career record like that unless you feel very strongly about something." What they reportedly felt strongly about was that Puri, in his six months in Calcutta, has done little—so they charge—about the problems the company is facing: stagnating sales, mounting losses, and crippling raw material shortages. Instead they complain, Puri has gone in for cosmetic personnel changes and has pushed them through with an arrogance which has only made things worse. Whatever the truth of the matter the fact remains that just when the company's bosses should have come together to pull the company out of the current mess, they are rent by uncertainty and tension.

In the context of the latest rash of trouble, Metal Box's burdens weigh all the heavier. Despite the fact that the disaster-prone ball bearings factory at Kharagpur —which lost a total of Rs 25 crore in the four years that it functioned—has been sold to Tatas, the company is still staggering along with enormous accumulated losses, none of which are of Puri's making but can be laid at the door of the company's senior management, some of whom are now complaining the loudest. From Rs 143 crore in 1982, the turnover fell to Rs 129 crore in 1983. As a result, the operating profit for 1983 was a dismal Rs 0.1 crore as opposed to Rs 7.84 crore in 1982, the pre-tax losses going up from Rs 2.17 crore to as much as Rs 9.76 crore in the same period.

The paper and plastics division is losing to the tune of Rs 1.5 crore a year. And, to make matters worse, the metals division which accounts for three-fourths of the total turnover posted a loss for the first time last year. Worse, the division has just 15 days' raw material supply left and according to a reliable source, no money to buy more.

VISHNUNARAYAN



Managing Director Kuldip Puri

For the last few weeks, Metal Box has been in the throes of a leadership crisis with over half a dozen senior executives handing in their resignations.

It is this alarming situation his detractors contend, that Puri has done nothing or little about. Instead they say he has "dithered along" for six months delaying decisions which ought to have been taken a long time ago. It was in September that he is reported to have suddenly woken up and hastily pushed through executive reshuffles at the top levels. Several senior executives were offered jobs which in effect would have cut down their powers.

That is their side of the story. Puri however, makes no bones about the fact that the company is in a bad way. "I knew the company was doing poorly when I was in Nigeria and whatever I have seen since returning only confirms that impression," he says. He feels that the company's financial situation is due to cash losses accumulated from the jinxed metal bearing unit at Kharagapur. He says in retrospect: "One cannot say whether our diversification into bearings was a mistake. As it turned out most of our assumptions regarding the project went wrong."

Strangely enough, Puri appears to be quite unfazed by the exodus. Says he: "Now we require a leaner organisation with fewer lines of command for being better suited to deal with our one purpose—that of expanding our market share." Though he would ideally like to retain only 170 senior management staff —out of the 215 in position in April, this year—he emphasises that the company will not "boot anybody out".

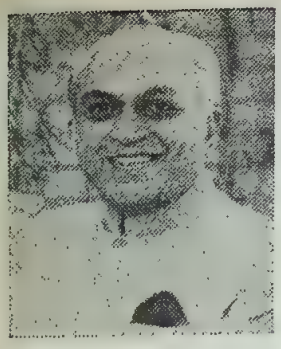
Even if the intention was not to boot anybody out, an exodus of top management is exactly what Puri has been able to achieve. But it is not just Puri who has made the bad decisions. Last year a strike shut down the plastics factory in Calcutta and continued for eight wearying months while executives—the very ones who have now left—to-ed and fro-ed trying to hammer out a settlement. However the board went ahead and shut the factory down completely, cutting off 400 of Metal Box's 9,000 jobs and depriving the company of an outlet in the very crucial field of plastics packaging.

The jinx appears to be continuing. Last fortnight, there were reports that the bearing factory sale to Tatas had actually run into Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP) hurdles. Says Puri, "Our discussions with the Tatas are continuing and I expect the matter to be resolved in the next few weeks." But he is clearly opting for discretion now: diversification adventures are out and the idea is to concentrate on packaging and on increasing the market share —which for the metal packaging business has plummeted to something like 40 per cent down from 45 per cent in the space of just a few years.

His critics contend that Puri cannot pull Metal Box out of the mire because his ideas on packaging are too old to fit into the modern packaging world. That however is as much a matter of personal opinion—and prejudice—as anything else. For the moment the company is trying to cope with the dust raised by the departing crowds of executives who had quit in disgust even though, as one of them put it wistfully, "It is the place where I spent the best years of my life."

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

NIRLON SYNTHETIC FIBRES & CHEMICALS LIMITED



CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

The Statement of the Chairman, Shri Jaykrishna Harivallabhdas for the Annual General Meeting of the Company held on 19th September, 1984.

Ladies & Gentlemen:

It is indeed my privilege and pleasure to present to you, once again, the Twenty-sixth Report on the Annual Accounts of the Company and the Directors' Report.

Economic Scene:

The National economy is plagued by a variety of paradoxical situations. A major breakthrough has been achieved in agricultural sector and crude oil production. But contrary to expectations, the industrial growth remains sluggish and continues to be far short of the sixth 5 Year Plan target. Despite a fairly good monsoon, prices of many commodities of staple consumption have continued to rise highlighting the steady inflationary pressures. The recessionary condition still continues in some industries. Though the Government has announced several pragmatic measures to achieve faster industrial growth, like encouraging higher capacity utilisation, liberalising licencing structure, imports of technology, etc.; yet the impact of these measures so far undertaken has been marginal. There is greater need to adopt development oriented measures and stimulate demand. Reduction of excise duty in certain industries in order to encourage demand is a welcome feature. I suggest such policy should be further extended to other industries especially to synthetic fibre industry who are experiencing demand recession, and need substantial reduction in excise duties.

Operations:

During the year under review the turnover has recorded an improvement of 11.14% from Rs. 130 crores in the previous year to Rs. 145 crores, but the margins have declined. The gross profit has dropped by 7.5% from Rs. 904 lacs in the previous year to Rs. 837 lacs. The cost of raw-material and other inputs have risen steeply. Cost of caprolactam which is the main raw material for nylon yarn was increased by S.T.C. alone at Rs. 6 per kg. during the year under review. Due to this increase, Company paid Rs. 250 lacs more. Excise duty structure was reclassified during the year which has resulted in an increased burden of Rs. 360 lacs to the Company. The emoluments per employee and interest on finance charges have further gone up. As against these, there has been an acute pressure on price realisation due to slackness in consuming industries, financial stringency in the market and intense and inequitable competition from new entrants and liberal imports. The Company has not been able to realise increase in sales price commensurate with increase in cost. These adverse factors were to some extent overcome by an increase in production. Textile/Industrial Yarn production was increased during the year by planning the productmix according to market requirements. The performance of conveyor belt division was affected by paucity of funds with the Company's major customers, i.e., the Public Sector Corporations.

Looking to the above factors beyond the control of the management and the difficult conditions under which the entire synthetic fibre industry is working, the performance of your Company during the year, in my view, can be considered reasonable. I am sure you will join me in thanking our able Managing Directors and through them the executives and employees at all levels for their hard work.

Dividend:

It is a matter of satisfaction that inspite of the recessionary conditions in the industry and lower available surplus, the Directors have recommended to maintain dividend of 22.50% i.e., Rs.2.25 per share, this year, in succession of earlier five years. It reflects their confidence in the long-term prospects of the Company.

Expansion, Modernisation and Diversification:

The Company plans to increase the production and productivity in the coming years of its major product lines and also diversify into new areas about which a reference is made in the Directors' Report. You will be pleased to know that the Company's growth plans are pursued by the management vigorously.

The Company is awaiting Government approval for the expansion of its polyester filament yarn capacity to 6,000 tonnes per annum.

I am glad to mention that the Company has received a Letter of Intent for the manufacture of Carbon Fibres with an annual capacity of 100 tonnes. Carbon Fibre is High Technology Product, manufactured only in U.S.A., U.K. and Japan. The Company plans to enter into collaboration with one of the leading producers in the world. Carbon Fibre, which is made from petro-chemical feed stocks, is one of the new developments finding increasing usage abroad in the applications in the field of space, aeronautics, engineering components, sport goods and in the medical field for implantation of artificial limbs. This fibre can extensively replace conventional metals resulting in reduction of cost and energy consumption at the same time having better performance in various fields of application.

The Company proposes to expand into new and improved product-lines such as Steel Cord Conveyor belt at Roha. The Company is awaiting the approval of the Government for entering into technical and financial collaboration agreement with a reputed firm of West Germany.

I am glad to report that your Company is planning to join with the Gujarat Industrial Investment Corporation Limited as Co-promoter of a project to be set up by Gujarat Tyres Limited to manufacture automotive tyres and tubes in an industrially backward area at Palej in Bharuch District of Gujarat. The Company will have an advantage of utilising its additional capacities of nylon tyrecord fabric and a surplus capacity of new Dipping Unit which is being established at Tarapur (Maharashtra). This project would help the Company substantially increase its turnover and improve profitability.

Your Directors are also examining other opportunities in the allied fields and will come with the proposals before you when any viable project is identified.

In the meanwhile, the Company has been concentrating to improve the technology, efficiency and utilisation of its existing plant by installing highly sophisticated machinery and equipment.

Debenture Issue:

With a view to provide for increasing working capital requirements and part of the capital cost of modernisation scheme, the Company has decided to issue 15% Non-Convertible Secured Debentures upto Rupees 15 crores in the near future. I am sure of your support when the Rights Offer is made to you for raising the resources of the Company.

Raw material-supply:

The canalisation of imported caprolactam through S.T.C. is causing unwarranted hardship to Nylon Yarn Industry. The indigenous supply is insufficient to meet the growing requirements of Nylon Yarn Industry since more capacities have been sanctioned by the Government during the last year. Since 1982-83 until today, canalisation through S.T.C. has increased the caprolactam prices from Rs.25 per kg. to the current price of Rs. 36 per kg. i.e., an increase of 44%. I earnestly appeal to the S.T.C. to purchase caprolactam at appropriate time and at reasonable prices, since it may not be possible for the industry to pass on such a heavy burden to the consumers.

Excise Duty:

I had stated in my previous year's statement that burden of excise duty on synthetic fibre industry is increasing from year to year. Due to cascading effect of duties on components and raw materials, the cumulative effect of price structure on synthetic fabric is all the more and make them beyond the reach of common man. The scope for development of synthetic fibre industry is enormous in our country and it is in the larger interest of the country's economy to encourage its use fully in order to supplement natural fibres. The Government has recognised the role which synthetic fibre can play in the multi-fibre textile policy. There is every reason to believe that reduction in excise duty would stimulate higher demand for synthetic fabrics and constantly widen the tax base. Not only that, reduction in Excise Duties will have ultimate effects on curtailing smuggled textile articles into the country. I hopefully reiterate that the Government will take a long-term view and progressively reduce the duty structure on synthetic fibre industry on a more realistic approach.

Current Outlook:

The performance of your Company during the first quarter of the current year and the trends in the present economic situation justify an optimistic outlook. I am reasonably confident that except for some unforeseen reasons, we can look forward to maintain the growth and profitability of the Company in the current year and beyond.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation to the Financial Institutions, Banks and other agencies who have wholeheartedly supported us in furtherance of our objective by rendering very valuable assistance, support and help.

I wish to take this opportunity of recording our deep gratitude to late Mr. R.D. Diwan, who passed away last year, for the unfailing assistance and co-operation we received from him during his association with your Company.

Before I conclude, I would like to place on record my deep appreciation of the valuable guidance, assistance and co-operation I have received from my collegues on the Board of Directors.

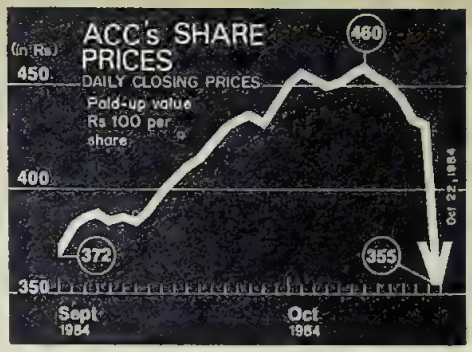
JAYKRISHNA HARIVALLABHDAS
Chairman

Registered Office: Nirlon House, 254-B, Dr. Annie Besant Road
Worli, Bombay 400 025.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

THE MARKETS

Uncertain Time



WHEN the stock-market cannot make up its mind which way to move, it generally moves downwards, and that's what it has been doing for the past one week, moving sometimes this way and sometimes that way, but with very few upward sallies. It is not its fault, of course, for it is waiting to absorb developments which are beyond its ken.

Firstly, there is the question of prices. Though the Government keeps on saying that they are under control, it is not really so and the marketmen are naturally worried that the whole thing might get out of hand in this election year when governments tend to be rather free with cash. Secondly, although industrial production is going up, profits are still under pressure and will continue to be so as long as prices are not. And thirdly, news from abroad is rather unsettling with the pound sterling sinking in relation to the dollar—it has lost 20 per cent in less than so many months—and the fact that oil prices are going down may not mean much since India both imports and exports oil.

All things said, however, the stock-market is not doing all that badly and things should improve after Diwali. The month before Diwali is always beset with uncertainties as there are accounts to be closed and debts to be settled.

A number of stocks are marking time because of rumours of take-overs and boardroom fights for control. Guest Keen Williams is said to be slated for take-over by a Marwari firm from Calcutta which may explain why the scrip has been so depressed for months. At DCM, the infighting in the family is telling on its share price though some of its associate companies like Shriram Fibres have been in the limelight. Surprisingly, Escorts, which completes 40 years of its corporate life this year, has not been affected much by its bout with non-residents and is being quoted at more or less the same price as it did this time five years ago, and so is the DCM share.

There have been few corporate reports, good or bad, but reports of expansion and diversification continue to pour in. Garware Plastics and Polyesters has stepped up the equity dividend for the 18-month period ended June 1984 to 24 per cent (14 per cent in the previous year). Sales have nearly doubled to Rs 60 crore and profit more than doubled to Rs 11 crore. Rohit Paper Mills has also done well with dividend stepped up to 15 per cent from 12 per cent last year. Bajaj Auto which gave a one-for-one bonus recently is going ahead with its new plant at Aurangabad and has also signed agreements with Japanese and Italian firms for making motorcycles and special purpose machine tools. Shriram Fibres is going into a totally unexpected line—auto ancillaries—which seems to be a fall-out of its parent company's tie-up with Toyota.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1984 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 18.10.84	Change on fortnight
Asea	75.00	48.00	62.00	13.00 –
Ashok Leyland	37.50	27.50	29.50	1.00 +
Associated Cement	458.00	298.50	436.50	21.50 –
Atlas Copco	43.00	30.00	31.00	0.50 +
Ballarpur	53.30	43.30	46.50	1.00 +
Baroda Rayon	295.00	243.00	271.00	4.50 –
BASF	49.00	28.50	42.00	1.50 –
Bata India	48.35	33.30	45.25	0.25 –
Bharat Commerce	20.65	15.10	15.25	nil
Birla Jute	62.50	52.10	53.40	1.40 –
Blow Plast	48.50	37.50	39.50	1.50 –
Blue Star	34.00	29.50	30.50	0.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	72.00	59.00	64.00	2.50 +
Britannia Industries	46.50	33.60	45.80	0.20 –
Brooke Bond	45.00	34.10	44.00	2.50 +
Century Spinning	907.50	790.00	865.00	17.50 +
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	52.00	2.00 +
Coates of India	30.87	24.50	26.50	2.00 +
Colgate	136.00	100.00	131.00	5.00 +
Cynamid	45.50	32.00	34.00	1.50 +
DCM	76.12	47.00	56.12	4.87 +
Dunlop	27.60	22.60	22.60	0.70 –
East India Hotels	40.25	29.00	34.75	0.75 –
Escorts	76.00	50.25	55.00	2.25 –
Food Specialities	92.00	69.00	85.00	1.50 +
Guest Keen Williams	23.20	20.30	21.00	0.10 –
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	52.50	2.25 –
Herdillia Chemicals	26.00	20.50	25.25	0.50 +
Hindustan Aluminium	51.00	44.00	50.00	0.70 –
Hindustan Cocoa	60.00	21.00	59.00	5.00 +
Hindustan Lever	58.50	46.00	51.50	1.00 +
Hindustan Motors	48.00	40.40	43.02	0.22 +
Indian Aluminium	25.60	19.00	25.50	0.70 +
Indian Explosives	31.00	25.00	30.60	0.10 +
Indian Organic	45.50	31.00	42.75	2.75 –
Indian Oxygen	38.25	33.00	36.70	0.20 +
Indian Rayon	75.50	54.50	65.00	2.75 +
J.K. Synthetics	52.80	39.00	50.15	2.65 –
Kelvinator	94.00	42.00	42.00	nil
Kinetic Engineering	156.00	113.00	147.00	4.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	560.00	407.50	560.00	12.50 +
Kothari (Madras)	27.00	22.00	25.50	nil
Larsen & Toubro	80.00	66.00	77.50	0.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	74.75	45.00	50.50	3.50 +
Mangalam Cement	31.00	21.00	25.50	2.00 –
Modi Rubber	30.31	23.00	23.00	2.00 –
National Organic	243.00	176.50	217.50	2.50 –
Nirlon	39.00	32.00	35.50	0.75 –
Oswal Agro	95.00	51.75	60.50	1.75 –
Otis Elevator	74.50	54.00	74.50	1.50 +
Premier Automobiles	317.00	246.00	312.00	0.50 –
Ranbaxy	55.00	44.00	47.75	0.75 +
Raymond Woollen	69.50	53.00	53.50	0.50 +
Reliance Textiles	144.00	110.00	141.00	3.00 –
Shriram Fibres	38.75	30.47	37.25	1.25 –
Siemens	47.50	41.00	43.75	0.75 –
SPIC	39.75	28.06	38.25	0.50 –
Straw Products	57.00	42.20	45.75	1.75 +
Tata Chemicals	71.00	53.00	61.50	0.50 –
Tata Steel	343.00	244.50	339.50	3.00 –
Telco	433.00	385.00	429.00	1.00 –
Texmaco	69.80	49.60	67.50	2.30 –
Union Carbide	30.25	24.40	30.00	1.00 +
Unit Trust	14.35	12.60	13.45	0.20 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	10.1775	10.0515
Austria	Schilling	100	56.1162	55.2101
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.0013	31.9212
Bangladesh	Taka	100	47.1129	46.9301
Canada	Dollar	1	9.2127	9.1160
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.0904	1.0764
Egypt	Pound	1	12.2229	12.0021
France	Franc	1	1.2824	1.2667
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5644	1.5465
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1129	1.0212
Iran	Rial	100	12.2212	11.9009
Italy	Lira	100	0.6429	0.6312
Japan	Yen	100	4.9235	4.8675
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8029	0.8001
Kuwait	Dinar	1	39.9559	39.0123
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0977	5.0039
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.7923	0.7891
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.7062	0.6991
Netherlands	Guilder	1	3.4811	3.4426
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.6729	0.6701
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6487	5.5787
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0702	0.0681
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4591	0.4511
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.3926	1.3761
Switzerland	Franc	1	4.8020	4.7498
Tanzania	Schilling	1	0.6629	0.6542
Thailand	Baht	100	50.1121	49.0123
UK	Pound	1	14.5285	14.3988
USA	Dollar	1	12.2625	12.1275
UAE	Dirham	1	3.1129	3.0198
USSR	Rouble	1	13.1722	13.0612
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	3.9298	3.8857

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd. New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 19.10.84.



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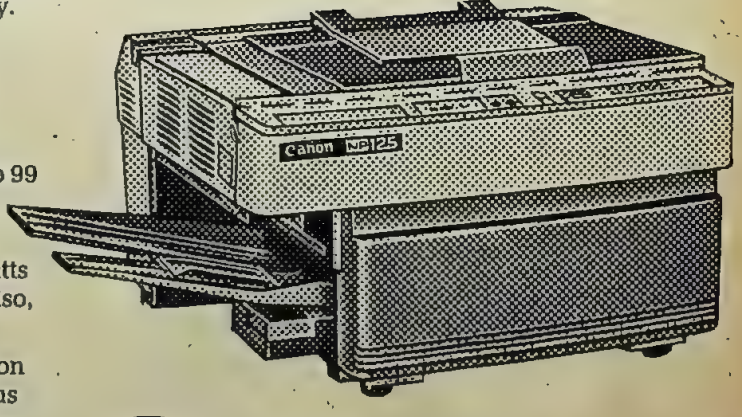
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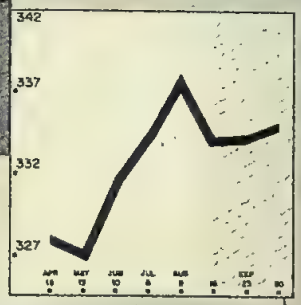
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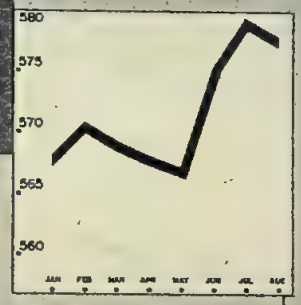
CONTRARY to the common impression of there being a fall in the wholesale price index, inflation is seen to have speeded up over the last two weeks once the seasonal fluctuations are eliminated. Commercial bank credit growth has speeded up, the trade gap has narrowed, and the growth in foreign exchange reserves has slowed. *All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data, to which a regression is fitted.*

Wholesale Price Index
1970-71 = 100
Current Trend 6.6% p.a.



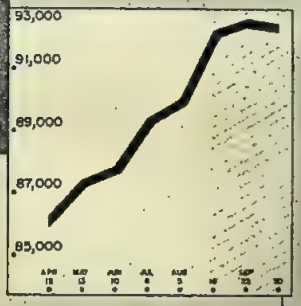
Wholesale prices increased 0.3 per cent last fortnight slightly above trend due to a spurt in the prices of textiles and machinery.

Consumer Price Index
1960 = 100
Current Trend 5.1% p.a.



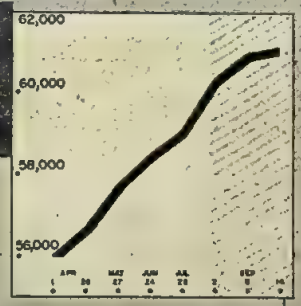
A marginal fall in consumer prices last month was well below trend, after sharp increases in the previous two months.

Money Supply (M3)
Rs Crores
Current Trend 14.9% p.a.



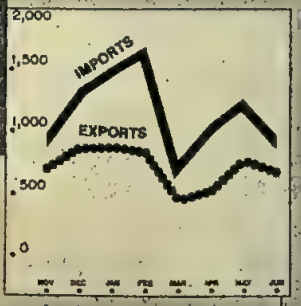
Money supply rose only slightly last fortnight: a contraction in RBI credit to the Government offset expansion in other credit.

Commercial Bank Credit
Rs Crores
Current Trend 17.1% p.a.



Greater liquidity was indicated last fortnight as bank credit to firms jumped sharply by one per cent, well above trend.

Foreign Trade
Rs Crores
Current Trend 3.4% p.a. EXPORTS
2.1% p.a. IMPORTS



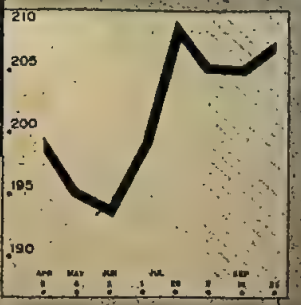
The negative trade gap narrowed last month from Rs 450 crore to Rs 300 crore as monthly imports fell more sharply than exports.

Foreign Exchange Reserves
Rs Crores
Current Trend 32.1% p.a.



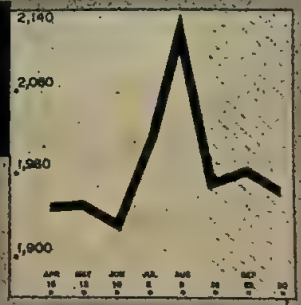
Foreign exchange reserves were up by half per cent last month indicating a slowdown in comparison with the trend rate.

Share Price Index
1970-71 = 100
Current Trend 14.0% p.a.



Industry share prices were bullish with a healthy 0.8 per cent increase due to jumps in fertilisers, tea and transport equipment.

Closing Gold Prices
Rs per 10 gms
Current Trend 4.4% p.a.



The see-saw in bullion continued as prices went down about half per cent last fortnight with a hiccup in the middle.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with highest inflation in September 1984

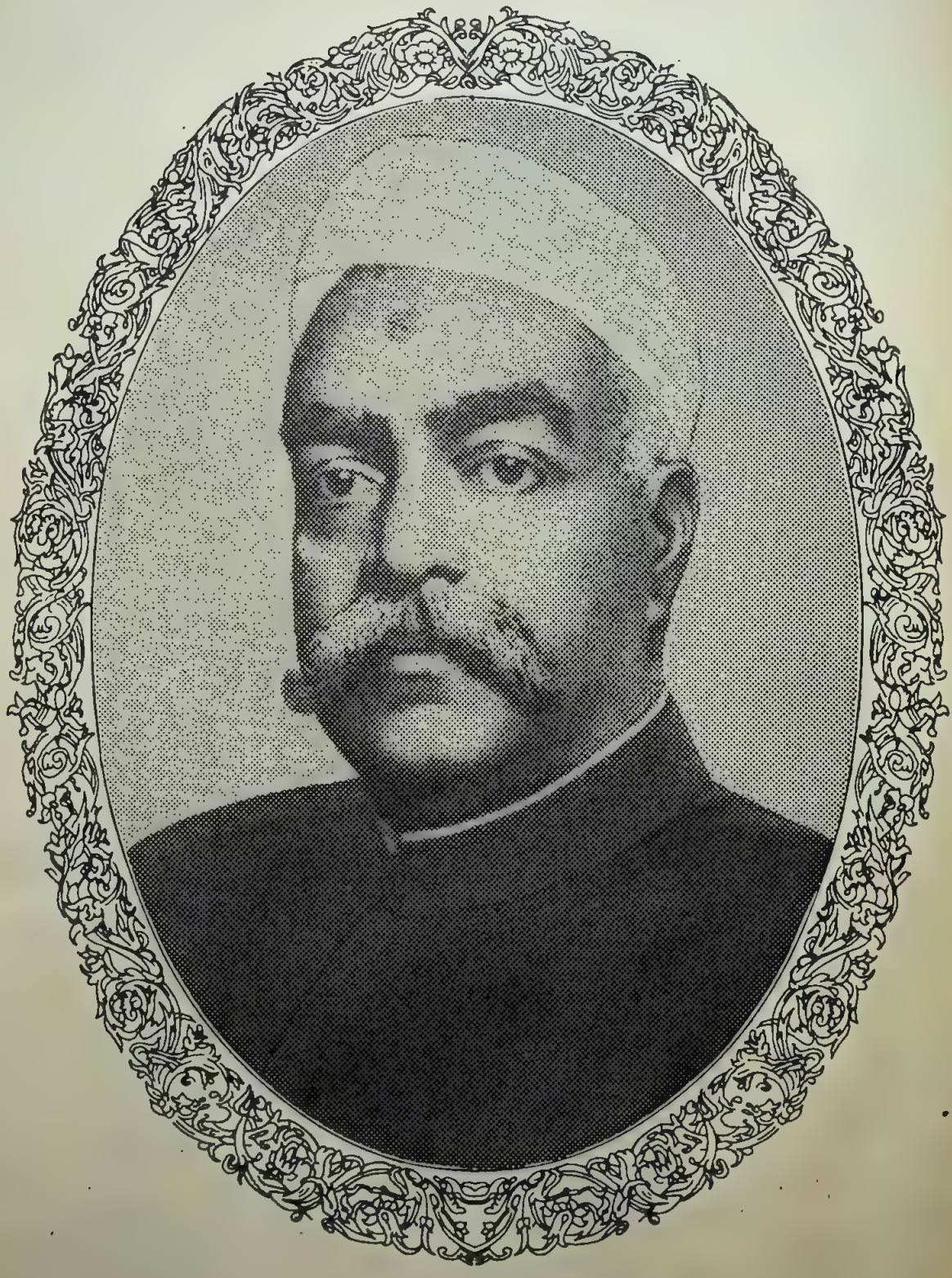
	% Growth
Raw Silk	10.26
Cotton Seed	9.06
Turmeric	8.19
Nuts, Bolts & Screws	6.99
Jute Textiles	6.88
Ball-bearings	5.67
Tapioca	5.01
Copra	4.56
Coir Yarn	3.50
Moong	3.47
Cotton Yarn	3.19
Dairy Products	2.78
Masoor	2.59
Insecticides	2.52
Barley	2.40
Coir Fibre	2.03
Ghee	1.99
Groundnut Oil Cake	1.96
Cashewnut	1.49
Milk	1.48
Crude & Natural Gas	1.44
Coal	1.24
Mining Machinery	1.17
Cement	1.02
Vanaspati	0.97
Pig Iron	0.95
Handloom & Powerloom Textiles	0.89
Aluminium	0.88
Raw Cotton	0.87
Machine Tools	0.87
Rails	0.84
Plywood	0.79
Steel Bars & Rods	0.78
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.73
Steel Billets	0.68
Industrial Instruments	0.67
Pipes & Tubes	0.65
Trucks	0.62
PVC Compounds	0.61
Woollen Cloth & Khadi	0.59
Maize	0.57
Tobacco	0.56
Cigarettes	0.55
Camel Back	0.54
Zinc	0.54
Steel Furniture	0.53
Cotton Cloth (Mills)	0.52

—Of the 139 important series considered, 61 with a weight of 40.6 accelerated and 78, with a weight of 46.0 decelerated during the period

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1984	1983
Coal Thousand tonnes, September	10650	9880
Crude Petroleum Thousand tonnes, September	2309	2225
Saleable Steel Thousand tonnes, September	535.6	441.0
Thermal Plant Load Factor Percentage, September	43.7	40.0
Call Money Rate—Bombay Percentage, September 7-14	10.0	6.9
Letters of Intent Number, August	83	76

—Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP



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- Lakshmipat Singhania Institute of Cardiology, Kanpur
- Kailashpat Singhania Institute of Medicine, Kanpur
- Jaykaylon Women's Hospital, Kota
- Lala Kamlapat Memorial Hospital, Kanpur
- Sir Padampat Singhania Mother & Child Health Institute, Jaipur
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THE SUPREME COURT

The Conflicts Within

WHEN HE took office in February 1978, Chief Justice Y. V. Chandrachud faced a formidable task. The Supreme Court, long held up as the ultimate bastion of democracy, had lost much of its credibility. The erosion began with the appointment of Justice A.N. Ray as chief justice in 1973 over the head of three senior colleagues leading to fears that the Government was trying to pack the judiciary, which had struck down the 24th Amendment in the Kesavananda Bharati case. But the crucial blow was the manner in which the court caved in to government pressure during the Emergency. Its judgement in the now-notorious habeas corpus case—when the court held that even an unlawfully arrested detenu had no right to seek redress from courts in an Emergency—led the country's leading constitutional expert H. M. Seervai to observe: "Coming at the darkest period in the history of independent India, it made the darkness complete."

Almost seven years later, with less than one year left in the longest term of any chief justice, it is doubtful if Chandrachud has succeeded in his mission to win lost prestige back for the court. Perhaps the task was beyond the capacity of any one person, but the state of affairs is summed up by noted jurist Nani A. Palkhivala who says: "If things do not improve, there will be a collapse in the system of administering justice before the end of the decade."

The court was marked by falling standards, a vast backlog of cases, a procedural traffic jam which once again proved that justice delayed is justice denied. And, the bench itself, the repository of collective legal wisdom, was divided within itself.

Consider the following facts:

► Of the 4,000 to 4,500 cases brought to it each year, the United States Supreme Court admits a mere 200 for hearing. Last year, the Indian Supreme Court admitted 102,544 cases (compared with 23,932 in 1977) and disposed of 80,604 of them. In addition, some 50 Special Leave Petitions (SLP) come up every Monday and Friday. As retired judge A. C. Gupta said: "A judge has little time to think and write judgements. My Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays were always mortgaged for homework on SLP's."

► The backlog of cases at the Supreme Court had reached a phenomenal 136,313 by the end of last year in spite of the impressive numbers actually being handled by the Supreme Court.



With less than one year left in the longest term of any chief justice, it is doubtful if Chandrachud has succeeded in his mission to win lost prestige back for the court.

► Consequently, except in unusual instances, it now takes as much as five or six years for the court to take up hearings, and it is now common for judgements to be delivered as long as a year after hearings are complete.

► Numbers aren't all. Indian lawyers tend to be among the most long-winded in the world. The English rely on oral argument, the Americans on written statements. In India lawyers first make oral presentations and then insist that judges read their written presentations. The time taken on well-known cases over the years tells the story:

In 1967, the celebrated Golaknath case took 13 hearings. In 1970, the bank nationalisation case was decided in 27 days. The 1971 privy purses hearing took 30 days. The Keshavananda Bharati hearings in 1973 went over 60 days and the judges transfer case in 1982 took up almost two months of the court's working time. "Nobody has a fundamental right to talk nonsense," says a judge weary of all this.

In spite of this, the Supreme Court deserves credit for some pathbreaking steps in public interest litigation and championing citizens' rights against arbitrary encroachment by the state. It seems, indeed, to have bent over backwards to atone for its Emergency sins. In the Menaka Gandhi case, in which the Supreme Court restored to her the passport which was impounded by the Janata regime it decreed that the Government must pass the test of reasonableness in its actions, that it must be "right and just and fair and not fanciful and oppressive".

In another case, Motiram versus the State of Madhya Pradesh, it revolutionised the law of bail by holding that courts must be liberal in releasing the poor and infirm, and women, from custody with only reasonable conditions. In Madhav Hoskat versus the State of Maharashtra, it made a landmark judgement arguing that free legal service to the poor and needy is an essential element of a "reasonable, fair and just procedure".

In the judges transfer case, the concept of *locus standi* was broadened far beyond its original, narrow doctrine that only a person who suffered legal injury had the right to move the courts for legal redress. The Supreme Court acknowledged that the poor and other disadvantaged groups lacked the assertiveness and awareness to seek legal redress, and therefore social action groups and concerned individuals were entitled to bring litigation on behalf of the poor.

This opened up the whole area of public interest litigation and in the last few years, a bewildering variety of petitions have succeeded. The court has ruled on behalf of bonded labour, minimum wages, women forced into slavery, pavement dwellers, undertrials, inmates of mental homes, villagers who are victims of pollution and Adivasis demanding the right to cultivate forest land.

Waxing eloquent over these new developments, Justice P. N. Bhagwati, regarded widely as the high priest of the new movement, observed: "It was only the

meyed who had so far the golden key to lock the doors of justice, but now for the e time the doors of the court have been own open to the poor and the down-dden, the ignorant and the illiterate."

However, cynicism persists, whether concrete terms much has been achieved the suffering litigants, despite path-aking court directives. Jurist Soli rabjee dismisses such negative doubts, inting out that instantaneous results nnot be expected when chalking out a w path. "For the social workers in such es to get back to the court for fresh ctives it ensures that their orders are plemented by the Govern-nt, including contempt peti-n." Contempt of court, feels ndrachud, is a weapon ich must be sparingly used. we should start prosecuting e affidavits we should have e prosecuting for every case", told INDIA TODAY.

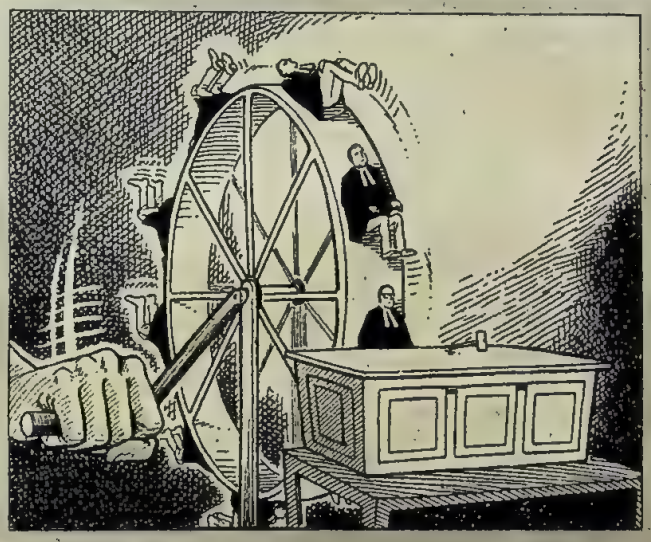
Ironically enough, even as Supreme Court was streng-ning the rights of the poor d downtrodden, it was part-with some of its own. Its pro-ns are not merely proce-al, astonishing as they may m. The Supreme Court is less n the body it should be ause it has yielded to the Gov-ment on key issues and ause the feeling of fraternity t should exist among brother ges on the bench has been re-ced by sharp divisions.

The judges transfer case was eworthy not for the judge-nt but for lowering the image he judiciary in the eyes of the mon man thanks to the rev-ions of confidential docu-nts regarding the appointments and ensions of some judges. Many said the f justice of India was treated as just ther litgant.

If the judges transfer case may have dened the concept of *locus standi*, it broke with a long-standing tradition t the power to appoint and transfer ges belonged to the chief justice. In deli-ing the judgement, Bhagwati held that chief justice's advice was not binding the executive, and the Supreme Court accepted the Government's conten-n that one-third of the judges in any h court should be from outside the state that additional judges should not omatically be elevated to full judgeship vacancies arose.

This judgement has been seen as an abdication of judicial power to the executive. Says Magsaysay award-winning journalist Arun Shourie, who writes on legal issues: "On general principles the Supreme Court waxes eloquent, but on specifics it has given the Government enough to pummel the judiciary into submission."

If the Supreme Court lost some of its glitter in this case, its image was dimmed further when it dismissed the Jagannath Mishra bank fraud case in December 1982. The judgement itself was not at issue; it was the propriety of Justice Baharul Islam who immediately after giving the judgement resigned to contest as a Congress(I) candidate in the Assam assembly elections and had, just a few days before the judgement, called on Mrs Gandhi at her residence.



If the judges transfer case may have broadened the concept of *locus standi*, it also broke with a long-standing tradition that the power to appoint and transfer judges belonged to the chief justice.

Nor has the Supreme Court covered itself with glory in its interpretation of the norms by which it should act. Lawyers feel that instead of acting on cases in which fundamental points of law are involved the Supreme Court takes up trivial cases. Says a senior advocate, K.N. Bhat: "Today it is not possible for any lawyer to advise a client whether a case is fit to be taken to the Supreme Court or not. The guiding principle is to say, show me the judge and I will tell you the law."

Chandrachud himself recognised this problem when he remarked: "People say that Special Leave Petitions are a toss of the coin and I am not sure that they are not correct." This isn't just a matter of chance, however. For it is rooted in a tendency that has surfaced in the Supreme Court of late: the disposition of judges to act according to their ideological beliefs and prejudices.

For instance in 1980, in the Minerva Mills case, challenging an act, seeking to nationalise sick textile mills, the Supreme Court struck down the 42nd Amendment which sought to enlarge Parliament's power to amend the Constitution. This is in line with its earlier judgement in the Keshavanada Bharati case, in which the Supreme Court in 1973 held that the basic structure of the Constitution cannot be amended and fundamental rights take precedence over directive principles.

But some members of the present bench such as Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy see such judgements as "a victory for the bourgeoisie". Reddy deplores what he sees as the class consciousness of the Indian judiciary, ever ready in his eyes to uphold the rights of the owners of property.

At an Indo-East German seminar, Justice D.A. Desai declared: "I propose to remain in the system, corrode it and refill it with new elements so that the system can render justice." Queries legal commentator A.G. Noorani: "How can a judge sworn by the oath of office to uphold the Constitution and the laws hold such a view. A fundamental change in the existing system can be brought about only by the people alone through their elected representatives."

Incidents of judges mistrusting one another are legion. In the transfer of judges case, Bhagwati described Chandrachud's affidavit as "delightfully vague". In the Minerva Mills case, Bhagwati recorded a dissenting judgement charging that the principle of collectivism, by which all the judges come to a decision, had been violated. But just before they retired in 1980, Justices N.L. Untwalia and P.S. Kailasam who were on that bench put in a note to the chief justice refuting Bhagwati's contention.

The clash of ideologies and differences on the bench have often spilled over into the open. In a public speech last January Bhagwati, who has often been in the thick of such controversies, said that some of his critics were ostrich-like because they found it difficult "to reconcile themselves to the new winds of change which are

roaring down the ancient corridors". Bhagwati went on stridently to say: "Trained in the old British tradition of adversary justice and born and brought up in an era where the doctrine of *laissez faire* prevailed, their minds are fossilised and intellect suffering from jurisprudential pubescence." Perhaps the most forthright and open expression of bitterness among the brethren of the bench was voiced by V.D. Tulzapurkar at a law college speech in Pune two years ago when he was a sitting judge. Tulzapurkar warned that the threat to the judiciary came not from without but from within. In an obvious reference to Bhagwati, who had sent Mrs Gandhi a congratulatory letter after her Lok Sabha victory in 1980, Tulzapurkar wondered if a judge could maintain his appearance of impartiality "if he sends fawning and flattering congratulations to political leaders or if he goes to the airport or railway station with a garland or bouquet to see off the prime minister or other ministers". Bhagwati was not Tulzapurkar's only target. Tulzapurkar referred to ethics of a judge denigrating the very Constitution he had sworn to uphold.

It is ironic that Bhagwati's letter to Mrs Gandhi warned her of the parlous state of the country's judiciary. He wrote: "I wish to bring to your notice that the judicial system in our country is in a state of utter collapse. The Supreme Court is also reeling under the weight of arrears and there does not seem to be any urgency in the court." Bhagwati feels that this letter was leaked to stir up trouble, but it is symptomatic of the situation that prevails—a situation which has led Noorani to say: "In the past there might have been some words between a few judges. Justices Meher Chand Mahajan and A.J. Kanhaiya were hardly on the best of terms, but in the present Supreme Court the judges are wrangling like cats. There has never been such a degree of pettiness and malice."

Some former judges are wary of the extent to which they see social interest legislation being taken. Says retired judge H.R. Khanna: "Even judicial activism has its limits; it does not warrant those donning judicial robes to take over the role of crusaders for the propagation and implementation of socio-economic ideologies. The role of the knight errant goes ill with the office of a judge. The courtroom is not a pulpit and the system can yield results only if we abide by norms."

Even more caustic about what he termed "new-fangled public interest litigation", former chief justice M. Hidayatullah, in an address when he was vice-president, questioned the propriety of judicial investigation into what he felt were basically administrative matters, or in converting what he described as letters and postcards into writs. Speaking of poor jail conditions, torture and the plight of the poor, Hidayatullah said: "It is too much to think like Canute's order to the waves of the ocean that judicial activism has halted these ills."

Both activists and traditionalists have their cheer squads. Upendra Baxi vice-chancellor of Gujarat University, accused Tulzapurkar of assuming the role of "chief public flagellator of the Supreme Court and knowingly hastening its disintegration". *The Statesman* Editor S. Sahay then called Tulzapurkar's Pune speech "a cry from the heart of a blunt, outspoken man, outstandingly upright man not able to put up with cant and hypocrisy".

SUPREME COURT JUDGES

Bench Marks

WHEN Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud retires next July after an unusually long term in office, his mantle will, if tradition is followed, fall on Justice P.N. Bhagwati, the next seniormost judge in the Supreme Court. But tradition hasn't always been followed: in 1973, A.N. Ray was made chief justice of India, superseding three judges senior to him. The Supreme Court, today, though clogged by a backlog of cases and hampered by differences and personality clashes, can still boast of some steller candidates for the post. A line-up of some of the candidates and their predilections:

P.N. BHAGWATI joined the Supreme Court in 1973 and is regarded as a brilliant legal craftsman and one of the sharpest legal minds in the judiciary. Clearly, he would like to be remembered for his judgements in regard to social action litigation and for his path-breaking work as head of the Legal Aid Cell. His critics accuse Bhagwati of possessing an overweening ambition and an ability to tailor his judgements to fit his prevailing point of view.

Bhagwati along with R.S. Pathak and Chief Justice Chandrachud has one of the worst records of delay in delivering judgements. One reason for the backlog is that he moves around the country giving speeches and attends the International Court of Justice every March. Bhagwati's admirers dismiss such criticism as jealous carping, and point to his enormous contribution in extending the framework of the law so as to benefit the poor and weaker sections. His speeches around the country are to propagate the cause he believes in so dearly. If made chief justice after Chandrachud, Bhagwati would have a tenure of a year and a half.

Next in line to Bhagwati is Murtaza Fazal Ali, former chief justice of Jammu & Kashmir. Fazal Ali has a high rate of cases turned down at the admission stage, which some aggrieved lawyers feel displays a reluctance to hear.

V.D. Tulzapurkar started from the bottom rung of the ladder in the Bombay city civil courts, a point of remark in the notoriously snobbish legal profession. He is an old-fashioned liberal, a blunt and forthright and outstandingly honest and sincere man.

D.A. Desai, originally from the Gujarat High Court, is blunt and brusque to the point of rudeness. He makes no secret of his contempt for most lawyers whom he derides for their objective in making large sums of money. Desai visits the USSR regularly. His iconoclastic views have upset many, and he is considered blatantly pro-labour and pro-tenant in his approach, and at times unmindful of legal precedent. He advocates that justices in the Supreme Court should give up their black gowns and wear pyjamas instead, sit under the trees and listen to people, "then perhaps something might enter their heads".

R.S. Pathak is held up as an example of a judge's judge. Setting consistently high standards for himself, he makes no attempt to play to the gallery. While adopting as humane an attitude as possible he will interpret the law consistently. The son of former vice-president G.S. Pathak, he gave up a flourishing practice because he believed it was his duty to take up a judgeship when offered.

O. Chinappa Reddy is an avowed Marxist who sees no inconsistency in a judge openly espousing political views. "Every judge has a personal and political predilection as a human being unless he is an imbecile or mentally deficient. They may get reflected, but a judge because of his training will be as objective as possible," he says. A scholar, Reddy is well-read in English, Sanskrit and Telugu as well as current events, and has a dry sense of humour. He is known to be conscientious about keeping his cases up-to-date.

A.P. Sen, formerly chief justice of Madhya Pradesh, belongs to the school of judges which activists term "mimic

And, if there is consternation outside, it naturally reflects on the conduct of business inside. There is now considerably less decorum in the courtrooms of the Supreme Court than its exalted position demands. Rules are no longer adhered to. Earlier, affidavits had to be filed at least five days before a hearing; now they are improvised and handed over during a hearing. Old-timers wistfully recall times when a whisper between a lawyer and his solicitor while a case was under way necessitated an apology to the bench. Now, as noted jurist Soli Sorabjee says: "It is not just a case of continuous chit-chat during the proceedings, but one often witnesses the unseemly spectacle of four counsels on their feet at the same time, each trying to outshout the other."

Caught in the cross-fire is the hapless chief justice who is faulted in the corridors of the Supreme Court for not providing team leadership and for not giving the Supreme Court a proper direction. Says lawyer R.K. Garg: "The overgrowth and undergrowth of individual judges have destroyed the sense of the collective." The silent rivalry between Chandrachud and Bhagwati, who is second to him, has only aggravated the problems of the Supreme Court. A certain amount of competitiveness was bound to creep into the relationship between these two brilliant men whose careers have run curiously parallel. They are separated in age by only 18 months and both came from the Bombay High Court where Bhagwati made his name on the original side and Chandrachud as government pleader. In the race for judgeship, Bhagwati scored first by being appointed to the Gujarat High Court in 1960, ahead of Chandrachud's appointment as additional judge in the Bombay High Court in 1961. Bhagwati was made chief justice of the Gujarat High Court in 1967 and felt that he would be called to the Supreme Court first. But the then law minister H.R. Gokhale announced that appointments would be made not on seniority but on age, and Chandrachud beat Bhagwati to the Supreme Court by some 11 months, thus winning the highest judicial position in the land by a short head. Bhagwati, some of those who have observed him closely feel, never quite reconciled himself to this.

The tragedy of Chandrachud is not that he did not have the capacity and opportunity to act but that he has lost a golden opportunity to rewrite the legal history of India. A fatal lack of decisiveness has prevented this intensely talented jurist with a warm personality and a keen sense of humour from rising to the heights some expected of him. Some of his friends were appalled at his siding with the majority in the habeas corpus case during the Emergency. In a later speech, Chandrachud admitted that he had made a mistake. Shortly after taking office, he agreed to the dissolution of the state assemblies giving the impression that he was toeing the Janata Party line. In the matter of the transfer of judges, he wasn't firm enough with the executive to start with. In the US Supreme Court, Justice Earl Warren, who also had a long tenure, was to go down in American history for his pathbreaking judgements in civil rights. Chandrachud's term will, by contrast, be like the Curate's egg: good in parts, and it is a toss-up which of the parts, the good or not so good, will outlive the longest chief justiceship.

—COOMI KAPOOR


Chandrachud


Bhagwati


A.N. Sen


Vardarajan


Reddy


Tulzapurkar


Desai


A.P. Sen


Eradi


Pathak


M.F. Ali


Venkataramiah

judges, following the phonographic theo- of judicial process" because of the nar- w constructionist view adopted. Prim, xtremely predictable, Sen can never be ccused of having an axe to grind. But awyers see his judgements as being cold- arted at times and believe he has a ndency to go strictly by the narrowest terpretation of the law.

E.S. Venkataramiah was a leading ad- ocate of Bangalore before he became a gh court judge. His judgements at times em too pedantic, missing the point in a elter of erudition. Venkataramiah takes s work so seriously that in the judge's ansfer case he presented a judgement of me 300 pages including a lengthy s on the qualities which make a dge. Justice A.C. Gupta, now retired, commented upon it caustically to a newsman: "If a judge had all the qualities mentioned, he would not look for a seat on the bench but a cave in the Himalayas."

V. Vardarajan belongs to the old school tradition. A formalist, and somewhat dour in his mannerisms, he keeps to the law as rigidly as possible and holds very strongly that the Supreme Court is an appellate court of last appeal only for very fundamental points of law.

A.N. Sen, a former chief justice of Calcutta is often compared to Pathak as a judge but is not so aloof. He is extremely warm-hearted, with a fine legal mind and much humanity.

V.B Eradi is another traditionalist. Puritanical and disapproving of excess, he can show much judicial insight.



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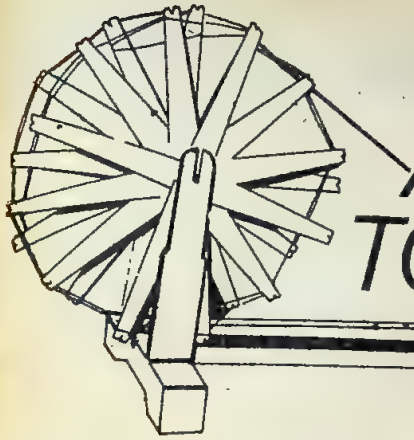
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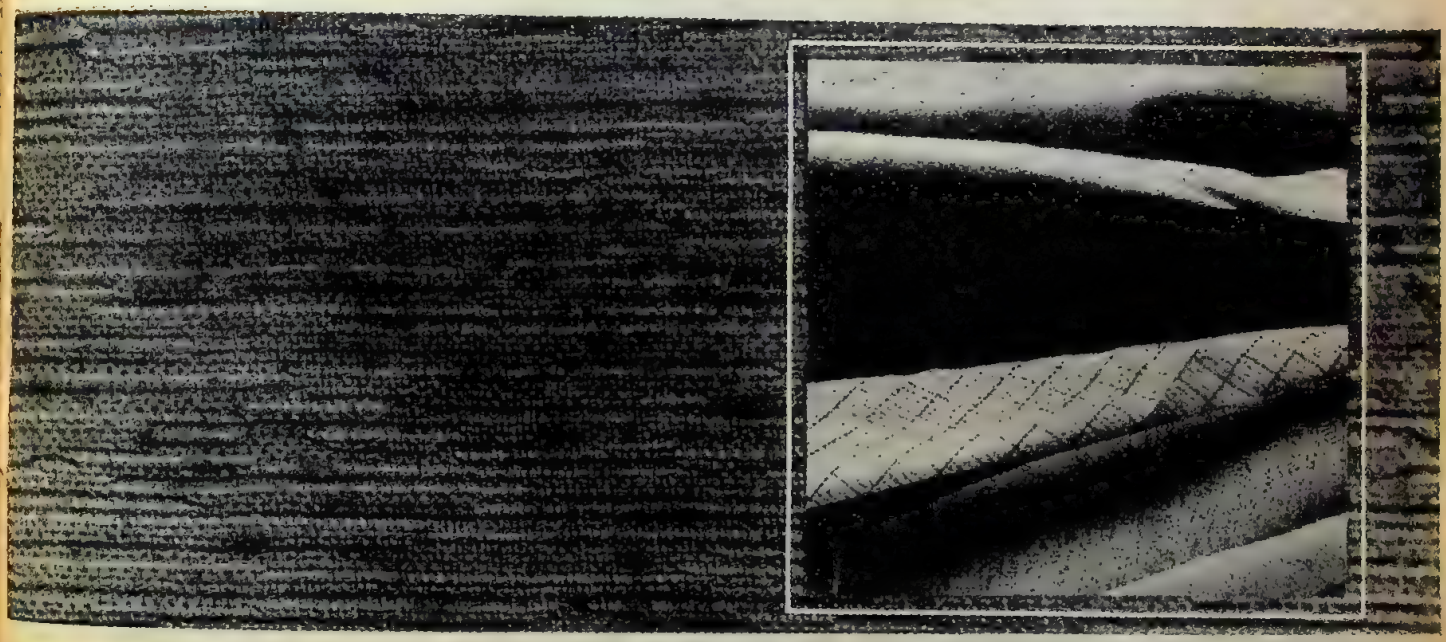
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OPIUM ADDICTION

A Dangerous Dependence

AS THE morning sun breaks over the deserts of western Rajasthan, and the villagers yawn and stretch themselves to life, they have but one thought in their mind: to somehow get a dose of opium—and quickly. For almost a terrifying 80 per cent of the male villagers of Jodhpur, Jhalor, Pali, Barmer and Jaisalmer district, opium addiction has become a reality far greater than poverty, a need more immediate than food and shelter. Rupnath, a snake-charmer from Jodhpur district, has not shaved for days, his clothes are torn, his face thin and sunken. He stumbles from house to house begging for food, but is unable to provide his family with one square meal a day. Yet he spends over Rs 10 a day for a tola (11.5 grammes) of opium, the deadly black gold, that he has become so hoplessly a slave to.

Rupnath, a Jodhpur snake-charmer, stumbles from house to house begging for food. Yet, he spends Rs 10 a day for a tola of opium, the deadly black gold that he has become so hopelessly slave to.

Although illegal, opium consumption has become a daily community ritual in western Rajasthan. Every morning, the menfolk congregate for the ceremony which is known as *reyan*. A respected village elder sits in the middle and grinds bits of dried black opium into powder, mixes it with water, strains it through a fine wooden funnel and then pours the golden yellow liquid into the cup of his palm. Each villager then respectfully bows down to sip it. The entire ceremony has complete social sanction and is, indeed, even quite majestic. The menfolk come in their traditional costumes and colourful turbans and it is considered an insult if anyone refuses to accept opium at the *reyan*. Said Manglaram Chaudhari, a villager from Manaklao: "When we wake up we feel that we are only two-and-a-half-feet tall. After we take opium we feel seven feet tall. Again as our spirits slump every evening, we have to consume opium." For many of the villagers, the addiction has become a ritual escape from poverty.

But what in fact the addiction does is compound that miserable poverty. Dholakram, 22, of Shergadh in Jodhpur district was so heavily addicted that he sold his wife's ornaments, his house and even his only goat. Unable to take care of his wife and daughter, he packed them off to his parents' house. After a while he realised that his life had got completely out of hand. Dholakram then did a brave thing—he joined an opium de-addiction camp at Manaklao village, 25 km from Jodhpur. Today his family is back with him and he is



A village elder consuming opium and (right) offering it at *reyan*: daily ritual



working hard—and he has not allowed himself to take opium again.

In the past few years hundreds of agonised addicts like Dholakram have been helped to get a new lease of life through these de-addiction camps, organised by the Opium De-addiction Treatment, Training and Research Trust, a charitable organisation based at Manaklao. With its 19th camp held last fortnight, the trust has treated 1,500 patients of which—a follow-up survey revealed—70 per cent had successfully kicked off the old habit.

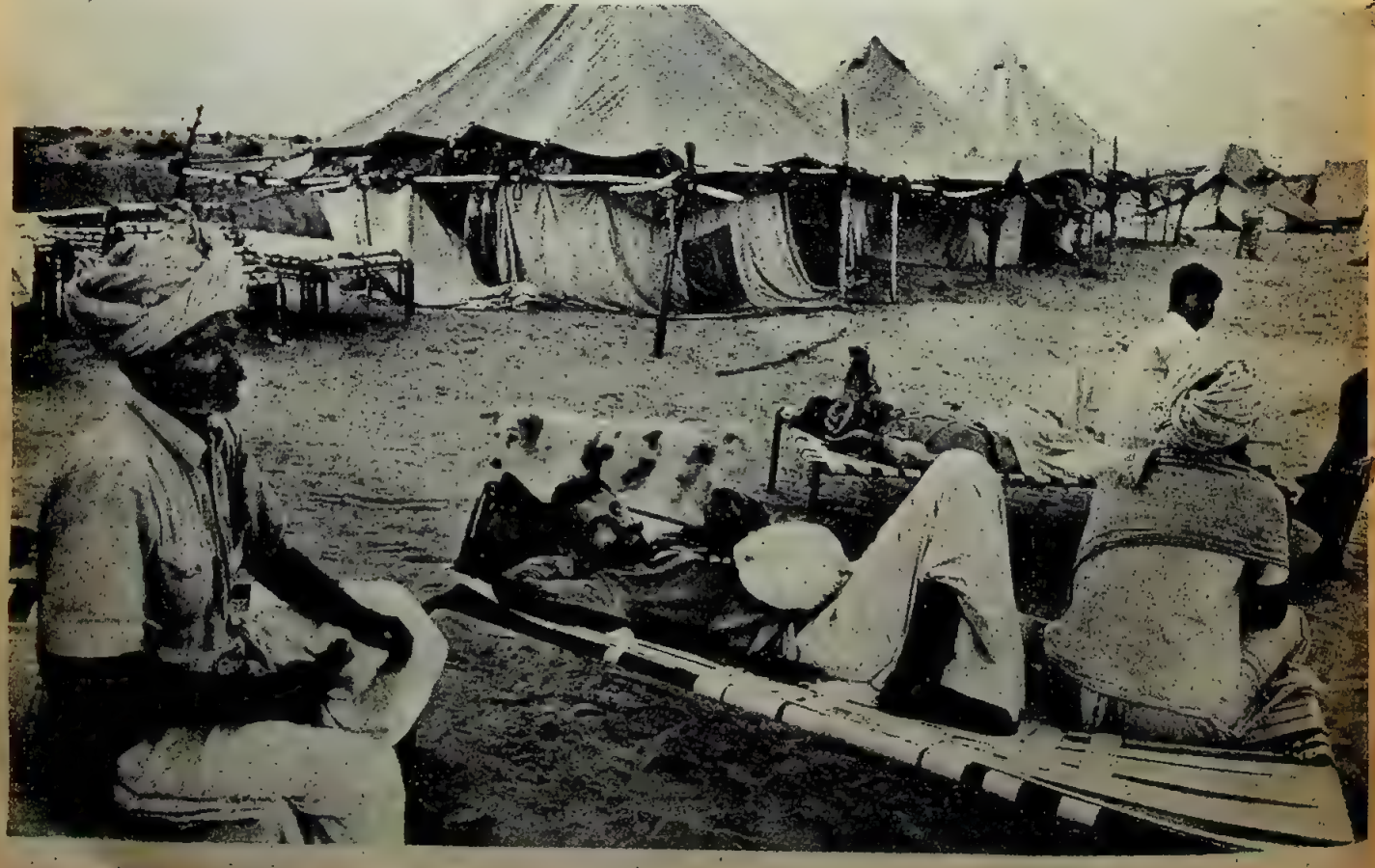


The one man most responsible for this success is 43-year-old Narayan Singh, a former sarpanch of Manaklao. When the Antyodaya scheme was launched, he helped some of his poor villagers get loans. Months later he discovered that the money had not got them a home or work or happiness—it had been squandered away to sustain a daily stream of the deadly drug. Aghast, Singh quit politics and organised his first rehabilitation camp. That was in 1979 and only 16 patients turned up. Yet it was successful—11 of those addicts gave up opium after their 10 days there. Encouraged, Singh took up this de-addiction as his life's mission and is today considered quite a messiah in the troubled world of the opium-eaters.

But Singh's task is by no means easy. The custom is an old, old one. When the Rajputs ruled the princely states of Rajasthan, opium was passed around in cabinet meetings. Warriors in the army took a dose before going to battle to get over their fear. The poor took it to feel rich. Through the years it became a ritual in every house and today the villagers hunger for any excuse to organise a *reyan*: marriages, births, deaths. Ironically enough, even when Narayan Singh's father-in-law expired recently, the villagers consumed a staggering 10 kg of opium for 12 whole days as part of the mourning ceremony. Said Singh: "I died a thousand times seeing this happen in my own house, but I could not stop this age-old custom."

Opium also gives villagers a high that they are convinced helps them work better. Initially the drug does have that effect, but after about three years, it begins to take its toll leaving its victims weak and shrunken. Dr Devraj Purohit, a reader in psychiatry, Medical College, Jodhpur, observed that addicts took to opium for four reasons—to honour a social custom, to work more, relieve tension and enhance sexual performance. Most feel they will die if they leave the old habit. Said Ramdutt Thanvi, vice-chairman of the trust: "It is common in these areas for employers to mix opium in tea given to labourers. It makes them work

Singh (top left) and addicts at his camp: the healing touch







A doctor treating a patient: hope yet

more when they are newly introduced to it and also makes the helpless worker report daily for work as he cannot afford to buy the black gold himself." Pratap Singh, 30, a government employee in Jodhpur got used to this opium tea 10 years ago. Steadily his body demanded more and more of the drug. He finally joined Singh's camp in 1979. Said Pratap Singh: "I will never take it again, it was such a traumatic experience.I was like a slave."

THE TREATMENT is surprisingly simple. It consists of nothing more complicated than some individual and group therapy and a good measure of psychological insight. The medicines Singh doles out to his patients are plain analgesics to relieve pain, nausea, diarrhoea. What helps more is the personal care Singh gives each one of them: he addresses the addicts by their first name, he observes who reacts in what way, he hugs and pats them to show he cares. Often when addicts suffering from withdrawal symptoms crave for a painkiller, Singh hands them a vitamin tablet. And the pain, being psychological, soon disappears. Said he: "All they need is personal care and a bit of love. Medicines cannot help an addict get over the crucial days." Moreover many of the volunteers at the camp are former addicts themselves, now fully cured and a tremendous source of encouragement to the new patients.

It is the first four days of the treatment that are the most crucial for that is when withdrawal symptoms occur, leaving patients considerably drained. But the treatment has its funny moments too. A policeman who came to be cured was heard chanting in a state of stupor: "Das rupaiya de, nahin to police station chal." (Give me 10 rupees or come to the police station). Another patient insisted on lighting one match after another one night to look for a pair of shoes that he was already wearing. Another tried to repair the fuse of a non-existent bulb in a petromax lighted tent. The laughter in the silent, peaceful countryside is itself good therapy. Singh also organises sing-song sessions to distract his patients from their nausea—and it works. Said a cheerful Gopalram Bishnoi who has only recently got over his withdrawal trauma: "This is a camp that gives everyone who enters a new life. Isn't joy conspicuous here?"

Hospitals and wards, on the other hand, have miserably failed to de-addict patients because of their sterile, antiseptic atmosphere. There is none of the freedom and close interaction of the homely camps here. Govindram Advani, 33, a businessman from Pali who has been an addict for eight years got himself admitted twice to a hospital. It didn't help. Last fortnight he joined Singh's camp and Advani was quite thrilled with his progress. Said he: "I have not taken opium for the last 72 hours. This is the first time that I have done this. In hospital, the ward boys would help us get opium and even when I was jailed in Pali, I got it from the jailor."

Ideally Singh would like to hold at least one 10-day camp every month and treat about 50 to 60 addicts each time. But, as yet, the trust can manage only around five camps a year due to lack of finances. The treatment is free and over 1,000 patients are already registered to be admitted to the camps. Some are from other states and many are friends of now-cured addicts. But the disease is far too widespread and these camps will have to be held far more regularly if they are to have some impact. Said Dr Bhimraj Vyas who has been looking after the patients: "We have not even been able to cover one per cent of the addicts." Maybe, but a tremendous start has been made. —RAMESH MENON in Jodhpur

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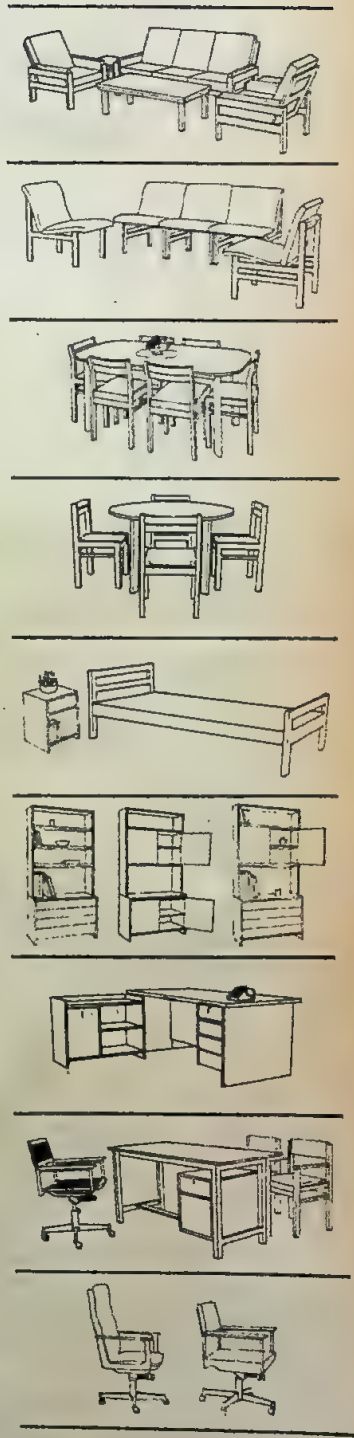
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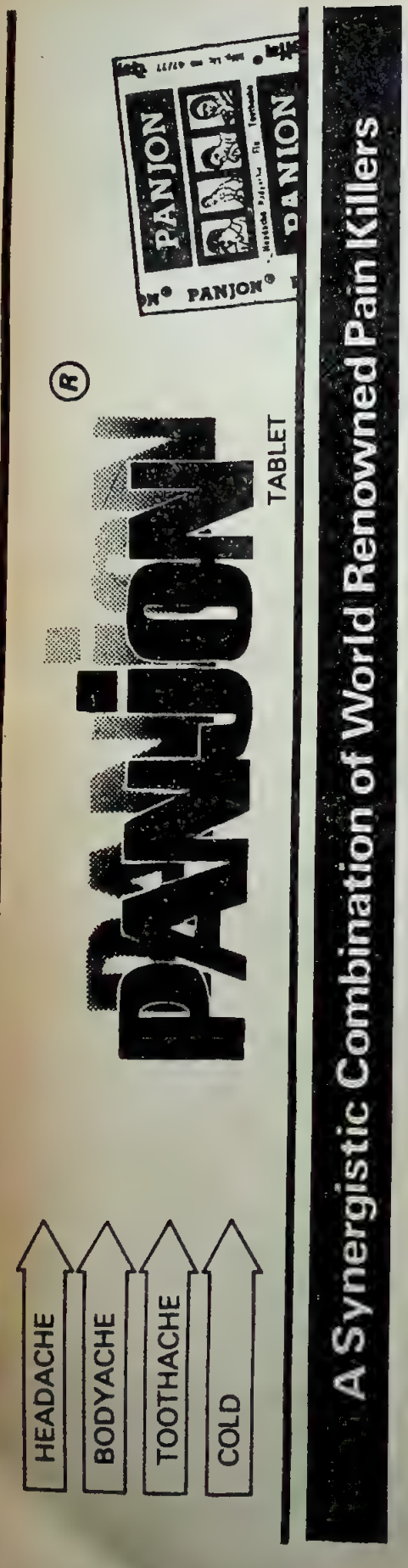
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New Finds

BEGGARS in India are a faceless entity, their presence only distinguishable by a whining voice or a sleeve plucked by a grimy hand. But not any more if the efforts of Shyam Bandopadhyaya are an indication. An accounts clerk with the Calcutta State Transport Corporation, Bandopadhyaya heads a unique institution, the Beggars Research Bureau, which, for the past 14 years has been collecting data on beggars in Calcutta and its surroundings. The 30,000 individual case histories he has chronicled so far have produced some hitherto unkown facts about beggars which, as he says, "may cause our political leaders to realise that for the vast majority of people who voted them to power, the only means of livelihood when they become old or disabled, is by begging".

One of the more startling findings of the bureau is that almost 70 per cent of the beggars he has researched are workers retrenched from factories, mills and other establishments who were forced to start begging when they lost their jobs. This is contrary to the popular belief that the hordes of beggars who throng Calcutta's streets are peasants from outlying districts. Bandopadhyaya also discovered that a majority of beggars do not live on pavements as is generally believed, but in rented rooms in various city slums. "Just because they have been forced to beg, they have not become rootless. Their family ties are as strong as anyone else's," says the amateur researcher.

Equally startling is the number of successful beggars he has come across in the course of his research. Krishna Pradhan, a former railway employee, came to Howrah after losing both his arms in an accident. Failing to find employment, he turned to begging and made enough money to marry off both his daughters. Bandopadhyaya found that there were at least 20 beggars in Calcutta who earn between Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,800 a month.

But there are other cases that border on the tragic, like Bhagirath Pandit of Midnapore district who had documents testifying to the fact he had been a freedom fighter and was thus eligible for a government pension. Failing to elicit a response from the pension department, he took to begging. Bandopadhyaya made an attempt to get the pension for him but before he could finalise matters, Pandit disappeared. "I do not know whether he is dead or alive," says Bandopadhyaya.

Many of the beggars interviewed felt that begging was a valid form of "employment" and there were quite a few who have formed cooperatives in which they take turns at begging and the earnings are pooled. Beggars' children, the research showed, start off as beggars but generally do not continue for very long. The boys become rickshaw-pullers or take to crime while the girls usually wind up in the city's red light area as prostitutes. Marriages between beggars are rare and the exceptions do not tend to last very long.

Bandopadhyaya





Almost 70 per cent of the beggars studied by Shyam Bandopadhyaya are workers retrenched from factories, mills and other establishments.

But among the more novel findings of the bureau is the political preferences of beggars. As many as 48.73 per cent of the beggars chronicled were sympathetic towards the Congress(I), followed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) with 24.24 per cent, the Communist Party of India with 13.12 per cent and the Janata Party with 5.3 per cent. For successive governments that have so far refused to officially recognise begging as a profession, there could be a message in that somewhere.

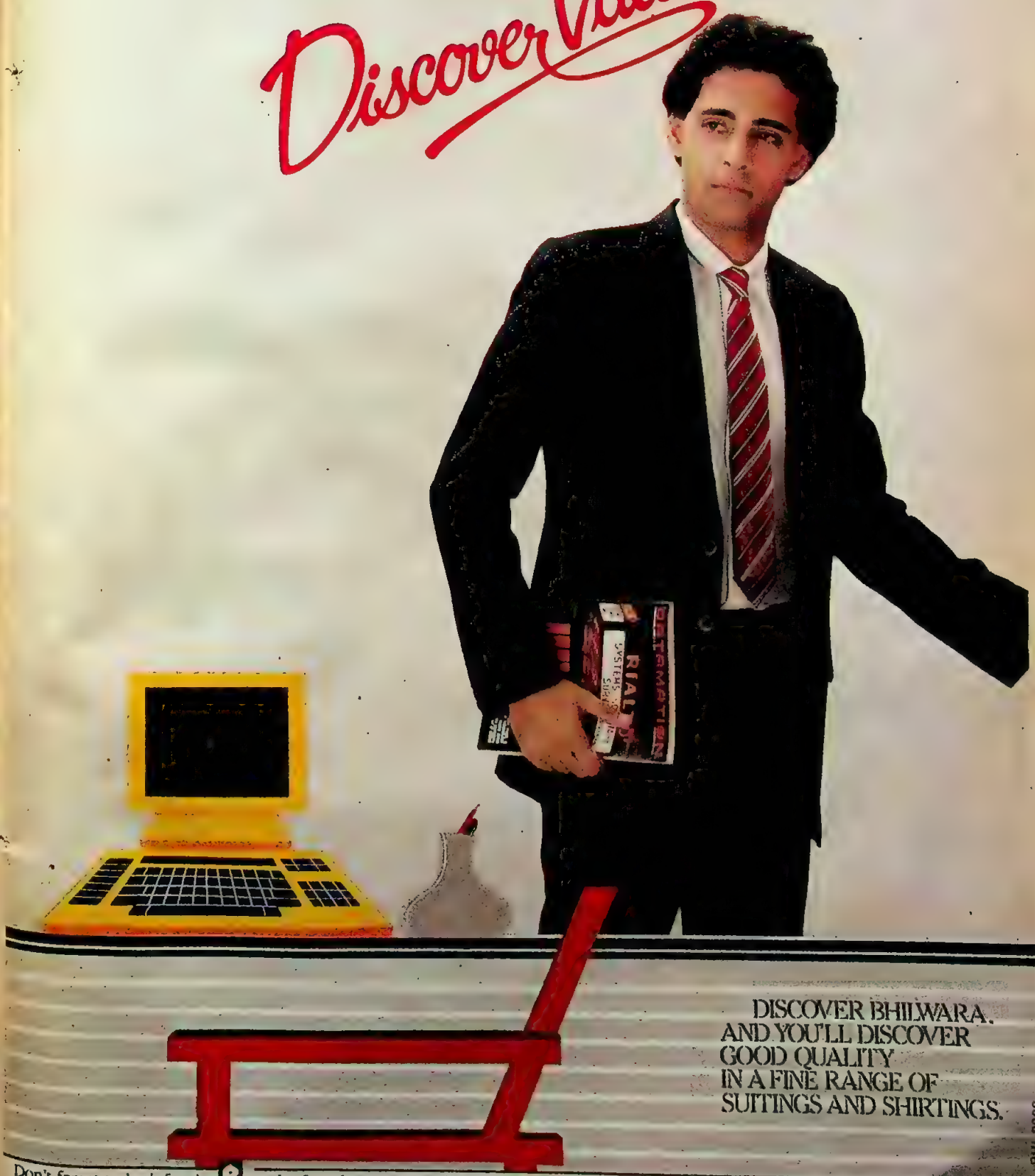
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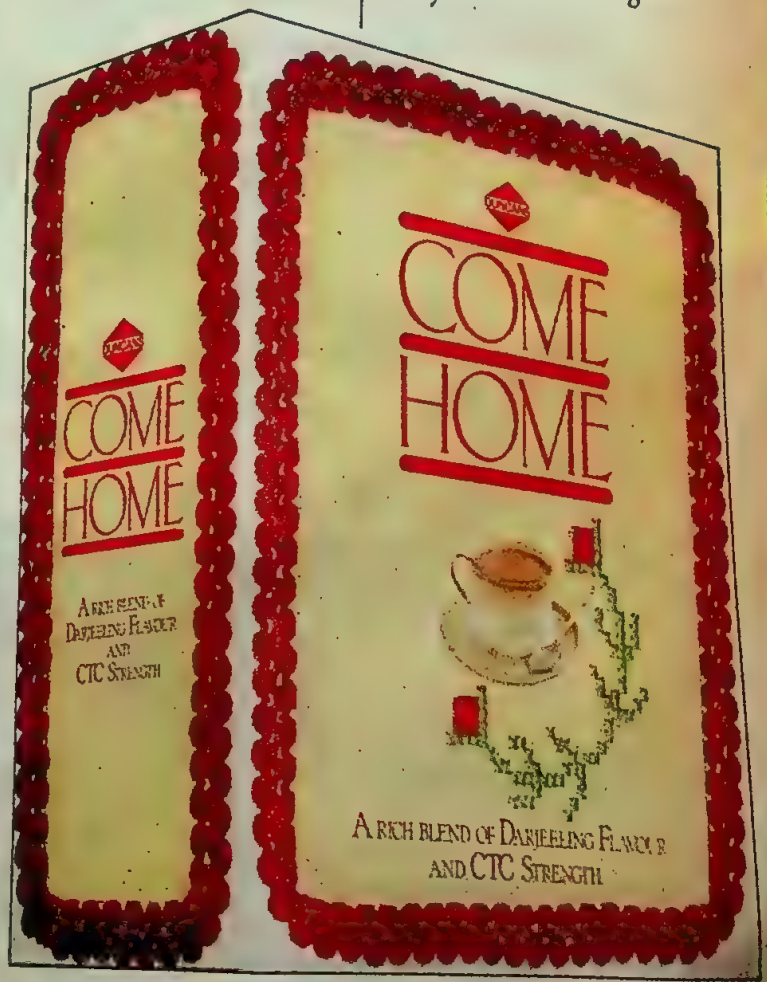
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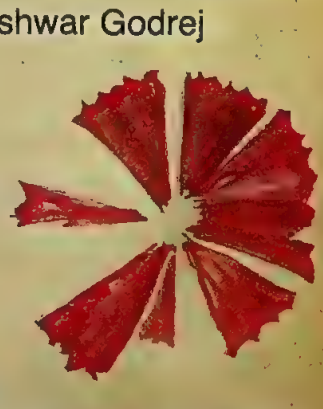
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Remember, the competition closes on 29th December 1984! Get details fast!

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CALCUTTA

Hooghly Hope



THE SAILING of the merchant ship, Aegis Ionic out of Calcutta Port last fortnight, went almost unnoticed except in shipping circles. Yet the occasion was significant for it was considered a milestone in the port's history. "The Ionic sailed up the Hooghly with a draft of 28 feet, something that no ship has managed in the last 30 years," exulted T.C. Dutt, the chairman of the Calcutta Port Trust (CPT), explaining that the Hooghly's depth, at present, does not allow ships to come in with a draft of more than 26 feet, and that too for only about 50 days in a year.

For a port haunted since the middle of the last century by fears of the Hooghly gradually silting into a shallow tidal creek, the Ionic was good news indeed. Although the Ionic would not have been able to cross a few of the treacherous underwater sand bars separating navigable stretches of the river without the bountiful waters from this year's exceptionally heavy monsoons, the fact that it did manage is cause for optimism. "We know for certain now that the river has stopped getting shallower and with more water from Farakka, it will be possible to make the river accommodate larger ships," the port chairman commented happily.

At present, the biggest obstacle for deep ocean-going merchantmen is a giant sand bar, Balari, in the Hooghly's estuary. If the Balari bar can be got rid of, 26 feet draft vessels could visit the port for six months and even deeper vessels could sail in during the peak monsoon season. Finally, "If we get all the 40,000 cusecs from Farakka barrage during the lean months, it might even be possible to get ships like the Ionic calling at the port regularly in the monsoons," explained Dutt.

Meanwhile, even as the Ionic was preparing to sail, CPT's hydraulics engineering department resumed work on tackling the Balari bar. Scores of country boats dumped strange bamboo "hexapods" into the estuary as part of an ambitious programme for building a great barrier across the estuary. "Our eventual plan is to block the estuary at the Balari bar and thereby force the tides to flush out a navigable channel," said Dr A.N. Biswas, the chief hydraulics engineer. The total cost of this River Training Scheme, as it is termed, has been estimated at Rs 40 crore, 40 per cent of which will be spent in constructing the great barrier.

"We are already being pestered by questions from Parliament about the effects of this scheme," complains Biswas, pointing out that such projects take years to implement. It took the Germans 40 years of experimentation to implement a successful river training scheme on the river Elb. While they managed to increase the depth of the Elb by almost 10 feet in 80 years, Dutt's expectations are more modest. He feels "even an improvement of three or four feet will make an enormous difference," for the bigger the ships coming into the port the cheaper will be the freight rates and better the port's prospects. At present, ships operate half empty from Calcutta because of the draft restrictions.



A dredger at work on the channel (top); and the great barrier under construction

But even this is a vast improvement compared to the situation prevailing before the Farakka waters started flowing into the Hooghly in April 1975. "At that time only small ships or near-empty ones with drafts of 18-20 feet could come into the port," recalls Biswas. Normally tight-lipped about the effects of the Farakka, port officials have now been forced to admit that there has "been a radical improvement in the upper reaches of the Hooghly due to the barrage".

The flow from Farakka has not only meant less dredging—less than one million cubic metres a year compared to about five million earlier—in the upper reaches of the Hooghly but has opened up vast prospects for India's inland water transportation. "The Central Inland Water Transport Corporation (CIWTC) is today carrying four times more cargo than it would a few years back, but even that 2 lakh tonnes is nothing compared to the 325 million tonnes being carried up the Mississippi each year," the port chairman said. The CIWTC has also, in the meantime, prepared plans to operate barges between Calcutta and Patna as soon as the lock gate at Farakka is completed.

Although port officials are optimistic about the Rs 40 crore River Training Scheme, Biswas admits, "There is a possibility that we will fail to remove the Balari bar." About 1 km of the barrier has already been built and the port authorities intend to add another kilometre during this season's programme which started last fortnight. So far there has been no indication of how the river will behave. This is why the port authorities are literally inching forward with the project for while there is no other tangible alternative, there is the hope that the project will succeed and Calcutta port open up to ships far bigger than the Aegis Ionic.

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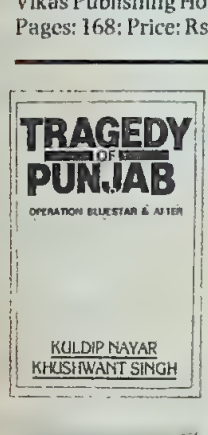
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The Punjab Experience

TRAGEDY OF PUNJAB
by KULDIP NAYAR & KHUSHWANT SINGH
Vision Books
Pages:192; Price: Rs 35

BHINDRANWALE, MYTH & REALITY
by CHAND JOSHI
Vikas Publishing House
Pages: 168; Price: Rs 50



THE PUNJAB tragedy has not ended. It may, in fact, have just begun. After the agonisingly long period when Punjab was on the international front page, the Indian reading public is now in dire danger of being barraged by an assault of authors, all grimly determined to be the first to unravel the tangled skeins of the Punjab crisis. In the three months since Operation Bluestar, five books on Punjab have already stormed the stands. Roli Books was first off the blocks with *The Punjab Story*, a smorgasbord of reports and opinions by journalists and prominent Sikhs. Two others, *Storm over the Sutlej* and *The Agony of Punjab* were more serious, introspective works that examined the problem with clinical and academic detachment. And, last fortnight, two more additions to the Punjab collection broke surface.

Of the two, one is almost as inevitable as tomorrow's newspaper. Both Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, pioneers of the art of syndicated columns in Indian journalism, can be counted upon to cram the wisdom of their collective years and experience within the covers of a book when the occasion demands. Both have already written extensively on the subject, more as armchair observers than field men, though Khushwant, being a Sikh, had an undeniably emotional involvement: witness the return of his Padma Bhushan in protest against Operation Bluestar.

The second book, *Bhindranwale, Myth and Reality*, is considerably more of a surprise, written, as it is, by Chand Joshi, *enfant terrible* of *The Hindustan Times*. Joshi had very little to do with Punjab as far as his newspaper bosses were concerned but that has not deterred him from producing his own hastily cobbled-together quickie on the Punjab drama.

The two books have nothing in common except perhaps to negate the age-old adage that a book should never be judged by its cover. The Kuldip-Khushwant effort is titled *Tragedy of Punjab* and the underlying theme is the tragedy that spawned the tragedy: the failure of the Government to nip the problem in its budding, and the political compulsions that prevented it from doing so. The book is more Nayar's than Khushwant's, the latter having contributed two out of the five chapters of the deceptive looking paperback—of the 192 pages, only 134 contain actual reading matter, the rest being used to accommodate annexures. For all that, it is a comprehensive enough account of the events leading to the tragic ascension of Bhindranwale and the final denouement that inevitably followed.

There is little in the book that has not already appeared before in one form or another, but both authors have had the advantage of access to the main players in the Punjab drama and, in hindsight, have drawn upon their conversations and interviews to flesh out the book into something of substance. The value of the book lies in the fact that the eventual domination of the Punjab stage by Bhindranwale overshadowed all else. Everybody remembers Frankenstein but few remember the monster's creator. So it was with Bhindranwale. In that sense, this book is a timely reminder that the sinister shadow cast by the villain of the Punjab piece effectively masked the larger, tragic picture. That the people who were responsible for creating the monster are as much to blame as the man who eventually unleashed such havoc upon the land.

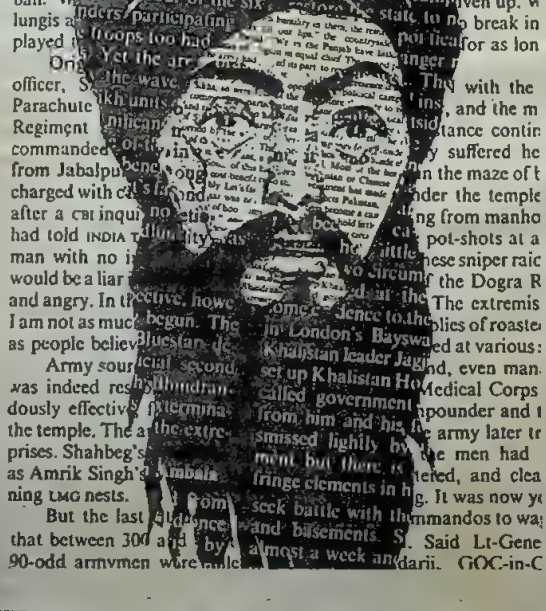
Nayar's version is that of an armchair detective narrating a particularly complex case he had solved. But the evidence he collates against the culprits is damning. Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh, in search of a 'sant', a Sikh leader to challenge the Akalis and whittling the selection down to Bhindranwale (Kamal Nath quoted as saying with childish naivete: "We used to give him money from time to time but we never thought he would turn into a terrorist."); the resultant power game that sowed the seditious seeds of a separate Sikh state; the refusal by Zail Singh and later Haryana's Bhajan Lal to arrest Bhindranwale when his power base was vulnerably narrow.

But the most damning element is the dubious role played by the Government in its protracted negotiations with the Akali leaders. Nayar had close contacts with the Akali negotiators and paints a grim portrait of their experience at the hands of those who conducted the negotiations on the Government's behalf. There were innumerable occasions when the two sides were on the brink of a breakthrough only to have it snatched away because, Nayar says, of political compulsions or because Mrs Gandhi had merely changed her mind.

However, Nayar and Khushwant Singh diverge when it comes to tracing the genesis of the alienation of the Sikhs. Nayar's benchmark is the Asiad, when Sikhs coming to Delhi via Haryana were humiliated and prevented from reaching the capital. Khushwant, however the historian, traces it to the British who gave the Sikhs privileges and encouraged them to maintain a separate identity and the economic and social factors that accelerated that process after Independence.

Though thoroughly researched and meticulously drawn, the Punjab portrait painted by the Khushwant-Kuldip combine is disappointingly incomplete. The sense of anticlimax at

SUDDHASATTWA BASU



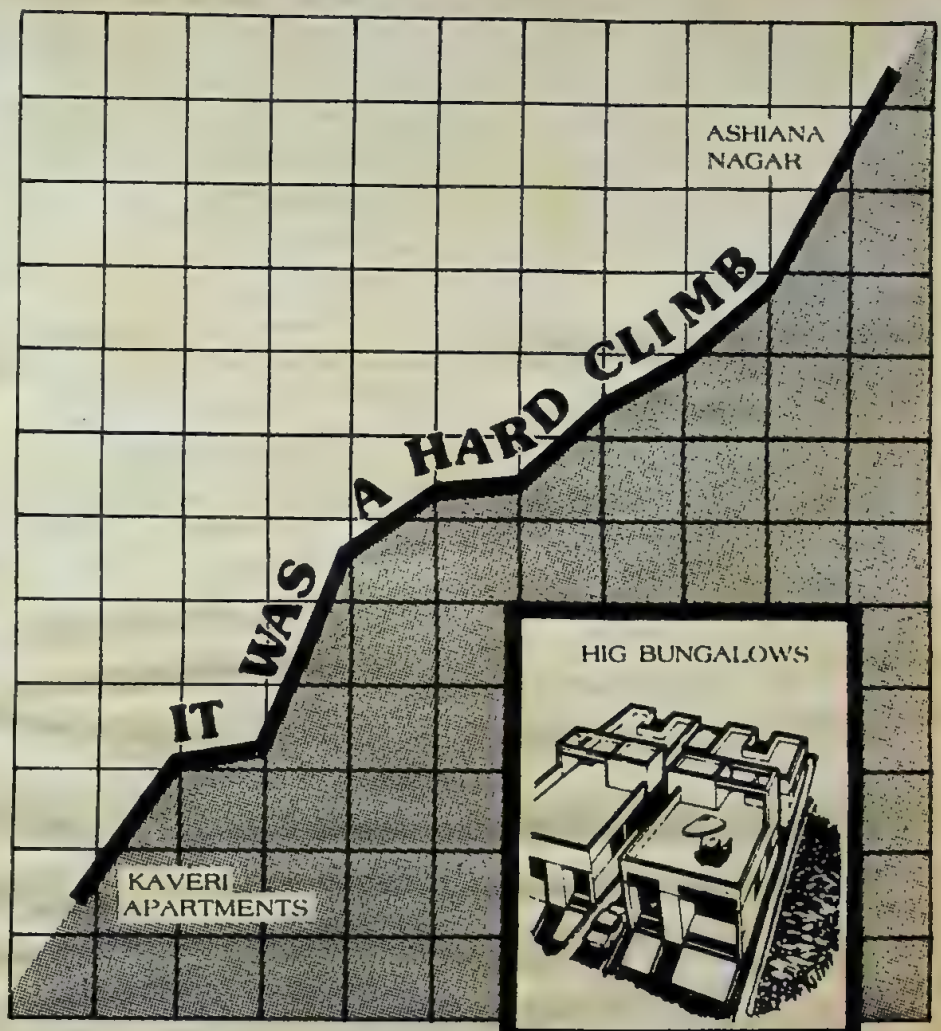
e end of the reading is because both au-
ors have penned chapters on what
ould be done now to provide the all-
usive healing touch without really offer-
g any concrete suggestions. Nayar
guely refers to the necessity of restoring
th in the Government's bona fides and
Hindu secularism in the minds of the
ths. Khushwant merely rambles on
out the aftermath of Operation Bluestar
d the so-called atrocities committed by
e security forces in the Punjab country-
de and eventually misses the original
int of his argument by the proverbial
ile. That, ironically enough, is the real
agedy of Punjab: too many questions
d an abject poverty of answers.

Like *Tragedy of Punjab*, Chand Joshi's
perficial scrabbling among the ruins is
mbolised by the title of his book: *Bhin-
nwale, Myth and Reality*. Joshi as is his
ont, walks the thin edge between myth
d reality. If Joshi had merely stuck to
ailable or acquired facts, this book could
ve redeemed his reputation. Instead, his
esistible penchant for flavouring his
tput with sensationalism proves his ul-
mate downfall. He claims to have access
the confidential files of the Research and
alysis Wing (RAW) and the Intelligence
reau on which he bases much of his
ry, and comes up with statements that
ggle the mind: Bhindranwale visited
kistan in June 1982 and the real conspi-
y hatched was a mass insurgency
nned in various parts of the country in
d-1984 to coincide with an attack on
dia launched by Pakistan. He quotes ex-
sively from conversations nobody but
e people involved could have knowledge
secure in the knowledge that dead men
no stories. He also extracts from his
gician's hat a man code-named 'fal-
', RAW's mole in the outlawed All-India
h Students Federation who supposedly
t the agency informed of the happen-
s in the Bhindranwale camp. He also
the temerity to quote a conversation at
Gandhi family dinner table which he
uld not possibly have overheard unless
was a guest, which is highly unlikely, or
sources were Rahul or Priyanka.

Joshi's account, sadly enough, has
re holes in it than a sprinkler system
d the leaks reduce the entire effort to
ggy pulp. It is obvious that the author
d the publishers were in too much of a
rry to beat the competition, and in the
ocess have instead disqualified themsel-
from the race. *Bhindranwale, Myth and
lity* has too much of the former and
little of the latter which is a pity since
n a man as notorious as Bhindranwale
erves better.

—DILIP BOBB

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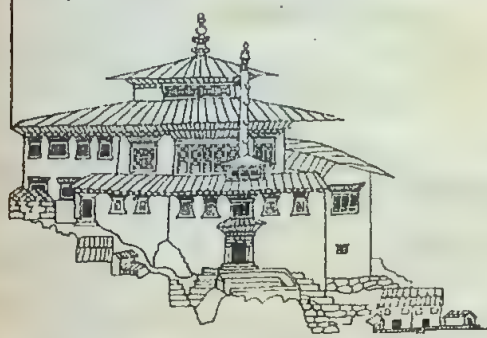
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Rich Tapestry

IN CUSTODY
BY ANITA DESAI
Heinemann: London
Pages: 203. Price: £7.95



In Custody

ANITA Desai's *In Custody* is her second novel to be nominated for the Booker Prize, and for a very good reason. It shows her literary star at its brightest; those who had begun to include her in the Margaret Drabble genre of fiction—a genre made up of high-strung, sensitive lady writers carrying on about high-strung ladies facing private apocalypse in middle age—will now have to chew their words. Reading *In Custody* is like hearing chamber music after a dirge; it has a bouyancy and symmetry so infectious that one wants to go back and read again the passages that provided particular pleasure. It is like those hilarious, outrageous but utterly soothing episodes of life—episodes exquisitely captured, for example, in the madder movements of a Fellini film—that one wishes would never end. In an especially arid year for Indian novelists writing in English made more depressing by the dubious odours of Namita Gokhale's *Paro's Dream of Passion* and Indira Mahindra's *The Club* Anita Desai's new novel is heaven sent.

What is even more extraordinary is that her material isn't dazzlingly original. It isn't a departure from conventional form like the writing of Salman Rushdie. Anita Desai sticks to the writing she knows—a lovely blend of assurance and simplicity—and she sticks to the people she has known and observed. Out of it she produces a comedy so close to the skin of Indian life that one can only marvel at the subtleties of her sleight of hand.

Deven Sharma, the young hero of *In Custody*, himself is no earth-shaking invention. A cross between Dr Aziz in *Passage to India* and Prem, the lowly schoolteacher in Jhabvala's *The Householder*, he has resigned himself to his drab existence as a junior lecturer in Hindi in a small town college outside Delhi. Nothing in life can redeem the dullness of it all, neither the silent accusations of his disappointed wife Sarla nor the uninspired students he teaches. His mind is only filled with unrequited yearnings for writing Urdu poetry, which he writes, but with little success.

Along comes Murad, his best friend from school, all raffish and pushy and street-smart, now engaged in publishing a magazine devoted to Urdu literature in Delhi, with an irresistible offer. How would Deven like to interview the great Urdu poet Nur for a special number he is bringing out on Urdu poetry?

Nur Shahjehanabadi is Deven's hero; from his childhood he has recited Nur's verse, long passages of it, by heart. In his youthful pretensions to literary success he has even written a monograph on Nur's poetry. Now an opportunity, a chance of a lifetime, to confront the sublime in person?

The sublime turns out to be ridiculous. Seeking out the poet for an interview, Deven descends into the lower depths of the crowded bazaars of Chandni Chowk, intrepid in his innocent zeal to accomplish a literary coup. Nur is nothing like what Deven had hoped for: a ranting, dissolute, sickly man surrounded by drunken young men and raving hysterical wives competing for his attention. "His beard looked like rather old and yellowed stuffing that has leaked out of his chest and was tumbling across it, dustily." And the dark-room where he lay effete all day only to be resuscitated by vast quantities of liquor and food in the evenings "reeked—of filthy abuse, rotten gums, raw liquor, too many years and too much impotent rage".

More galling is the spectacle of the great poet's second wife—the ferocious Imtiaz Begum, an erstwhile dancing girl who now dominates Nur's life and his poetry, reducing him to a sputtering nincompoop in her presence. In this raucous, decadent world Deven hovers in search of genius. Returning home to the grey, boring solidity of his wife and son and college job he is at first thankful of making "a timely escape from complexities with which he would not have known how to contend".

Slowly, however, the world of Nur overtakes his own. In pursuit of the interview, Deven manages to purchase a tape-recorder. He is determined to emerge triumphant. As scene after scene of superbly comic moments—the annual day at Deven's college, the expedition to buy the tape-recorder—follow each other, chances are that Deven's may be vanquished by the world he hopes to conquer. Anita Desai's comedy turns inexorably black, as inexorably as Deven is drawn to the vortex of the poet's world. Catastrophe, inevitably, characterises the denouement of the richly comic crescendo.

It is in the study of the rich contrasts, of comedy following tragedy, of youthful innocence paraded against the acrimony of old age and decay, of literary aspiration viewed in the fading light of dissipated genius, that Anita Desai achieves perfection. Combined with the unhurried, wryly evocative descriptions of people and situations, *In Custody* is without doubt the best novel of the year, a landmark in Anita Desai's expanding *oeuvre*. —SUNIL SETHI

EXTRACT

'Imtiaz Begum,' called a voice from the audience, 'you are like a star fallen into the well of the courtyard from which we have come to fetch water. When will you quench our thirst? Give us the star poems. Will you give us the star poems. Will you give us the star poems tonight?' 'I can recite nothing—nothing—until my accompanists have had enough refreshments and decide to come out,' she called back, joking, in an excited, high-pitched voice that grated on Deven's ear like a fingernail on a glass pane, and a cry went up for the accompanists who now found themselves hustled down the stairs from the upper rooms and brought along like a team of oxen, or servants, to range themselves behind her on the divan and start tuning their instruments. Some of them were still wiping their mouths and dusting crumbs off their lapels. Imtiaz Begum drew a laugh when she leaned towards one of them and flicked some shreds of sweet off his shoulder, making him rear back as if stung.

'So had your last drink to help you survive this evening?' she teased them, an awful menace under the mock sweetness of her tone, and her audience roared delightedly while the drummer and the harmonium player broke into a sweat and pretended to busy themselves with knocking on drums with the tuning hammer and strumming the harmonium. A young woman with bulging eyes staring out of the pale, triangular face of a fanatic, ran her fingers wildly over the strings of the upright tanpura, over and over and over, till Imtiaz Begum turned and asked her to please play in tune or not at all whereupon she stopped playing altogether and appeared paralysed.

Someone brought a silver box of betel nuts and leaves—the smile Imtiaz Begum gave was as sudden and swift as if scissors had cut it through her face, snip-snap, and the teeth were stained red besides.

REACT/0195/84

The 20 points that became our proving ground

For the new Karnataka Government which assumed office in 1983, the 20-point programme was clearly the proving ground for the tasks it had set out to achieve.

Now it's time to look back at the progress made in the past 18 months—point by point.

"Improving irrigation facilities and the techniques of dry land farming"

1 In 1983, as much as 1,05,065 hectares of additional land were provided with irrigation. In comparison, only 48,413 hectares of additional land were irrigated in 1980-81, and 35,111 hectares, in 1981-82.

Similarly, the dry land improvement project was infused with new vigour. In 1983-84, 125 field demonstrations were conducted over 43,935 hectares to educate farmers on scientific techniques.

"Increasing the production of pulses and edible oil seeds"

2 The table below shows Karnataka's impressive achievements in the area of pulses and edible oil seeds during 1983-84.

	Pulses		Oil seeds	
	Area (in lakh hectares)	Yield (in lakh tonnes)	Area (in lakh hectares)	Yield (in lakh tonnes)
1982-83	13.16	4.59	14.12	7.68
1983-84	16.72	8.34	19.78	13.05

"Strengthening and extending the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the National Rural Employment Programme"

3 In a recent review, the Planning Commission ranked Karnataka second, among all states, in its successful implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

In 1983, the Karnataka Government added to the IRDP by introducing the 'Anthyodaya' scheme. Aimed at ameliorating the economic conditions of the poorest of the poor, it benefited 2.02 lakh people during the year—193% of the target set.

In 1983-84, Karnataka spent as much as Rs. 26.12 crores for the National Rural Employment Programme alone, and exceeded the target set for mandays of employment by 127%. An achievement confirmed by the Planning Commission. In addition to implementing the National Rural Employment Programme, the Karnataka Government has introduced a Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This scheme guarantees employment to all able bodied persons between 18 and 60 years of age for any length of time during any part of the year.

"Enforcing land reforms and the distribution of additional holdings"

4 The credit for implementing the most progressive Land Reforms Act in the country goes to Karnataka. The implementation of these reforms is now in its final stages of completion.

"Ensuring minimum wages for agricultural labourers"

5 The Karnataka Government has been periodically reviewing these wages to ensure fair remuneration at all levels.

In 1983-84, the Government carried out 2,613 checks to ensure the regular payment of wages. This was a considerable improvement over the 1,110 such checks carried out in each of the years 1980-81, 1981-82 and 1982-83.

"Rehabilitation of liberated bonded labourers"

6 Current efforts concentrate on streamlining the process to extend rehabilitation facilities to as many labourers as possible.

Under this programme, 3,149 freed, bonded labourers were rehabilitated in 1983-84.

"Intensifying development programmes for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes"

7 The table indicates the extent to which the new Karnataka Government has succeeded in helping scheduled castes and tribes during 1983-84, as compared to the previous year.

Year	SC families	ST families
1982-83	98,816	3,923
1983-84	1,40,084	3,889

"Ensuring the supply of drinking water to all villages"

8 One example of the new Government's efforts is a special drive which relieved the acute water shortage problems in 20,000 villages within the short period of 18 months.

Moreover, according to performance indicators, Karnataka is probably the only state which has completed the task of providing water to problem villages—one year ahead of schedule.

To augment drinking water supply in urban areas, the Government has already spent over Rs. 25 lakhs and drilled over 170 borewells. An additional 100 borewells are to be drilled in Bangalore city alone.

"Providing house sites to rural families and offering assistance in construction"

9 In 1983-84, 65,050 houses and 83,703 sites were distributed in rural areas. According to the Planning Commission, Karnataka is among the few states which successfully carried out the programme of site distribution in 1983-84.

"Improving the slum environment with better living conditions for slum dwellers"

10 The Planning Commission has credited Karnataka with a special mention for gaining the first place in implementing the slum development programme. During 1983-84, the Government's effectiveness was a phenomenal 175%.

11 *During 1983-84, the Karnataka Government invested Rs. 8 crores more than in the previous*

12 As a result of the Government's efforts, the number of trees planted in 1983-84 was 4.48 crores

14 To extend health service facilities to the rural areas, the Karnataka Government has

care and to children. They will also provide specialist doctors, regular health checks and informal education.

our growing ground

11 During 1983-84, the Karnataka Government invested Rs. 8 crores more than in the previous year and increased the generation of electricity from 7723 million units to 7823 million.

Karnataka had never before crossed its target for rural electrification. In 1983-84, it not only exceeded it by 83%, but was second among all states. In the electrification of pumpsets, Karnataka ranked first in the country by exceeding the target by 96%.

The table below shows the Government's performance in 1983-84.

Year	No. of villages electrified	No. of pumpsets electrified
1982-83	755	25,000
1983-84	1,829	37,187

12 As a result of the Government's efforts, the number of trees planted in 1983-84 was 4.48 crores more than in the previous year.

In the area of alternate sources of fuel, Karnataka's achievement in 1983-84 was 166% against the target set.

"Widening the scope of the Family Planning Programme"

13 During 1983-84, the Government of Karnataka extended additional incentives to widen the scope of the family planning programme. During the year, more people adopted family planning measures than ever before.

Year	No. of operations
1982-83	2,32,000
1983-84	2,39,000

14 To extend health service facilities to the rural areas, the Karnataka Government has strengthened the network of primary health centres and sub-centres. During 1983-84, the State surpassed the performance of the previous year by 54%.

Year	No. of primary health units	No. of primary health sub-units
1982-83	10	300
1983-84	10	462

"Speeding up the welfare programme for women and children"

15 In addition to Central Government-approved child development centres, the Karnataka Government plans to run similar centres at its own expense, all over the State. care and to children. They will also provide specialist doctors, regular health checks and informal education.

Year	No. of centres started	No. of those benefited
1982-83	61	1,74,256
1983-84	78	6,46,296

"Providing primary education for children and increasing literacy in the State"

16 In 1983-84, 54 lakh children were admitted to primary and middle schools – a record unparalled in any previous year.

The State Government has drawn up a revolutionary scheme – the 'Akshara Sene' – under which pre-primary education and adult literacy centres have been set up throughout the State. In the current year, Rs. 148 lakhs has been set aside for this scheme.

and the milestones

"Increasing the number of fair price shops and expanding the public distribution system"

17 Over the last year the number of fair price shops has been increased considerably. Steps have also been taken to streamline the public distribution system. Watchdog committees have been set up in all Assembly Constituencies to ensure the proper functioning of fair price shops. The table shows the increase in the number of fair price shops.

Year	Newly started fair price shops
1982-83	706
1983-84	969

"Relaxing methods of capital investment and simplifying the industrial policy"

18 The new industrial policy formulated by the present Government aims at encouraging small and village industries to provide more employment to people. During 1983-84, 9,914 new industrial units were set up – a remarkable achievement of 196% over the target.

"Intensifying measures against smugglers, hoarders and tax evaders"

19 The Karnataka Government has concentrated on measures against smugglers, hoarders and tax evaders.

Between January and May this year, 756 raids were made and 126 cases were discovered. Prosecution was launched against 155 persons and goods worth Rs. 1,07,74,476 were confiscated.

"Improving the efficiency of public sector industries"

20 The Karnataka State Bureau of Public Enterprises, set up to streamline the functioning of State Government-owned industries, has already studied and formulated recommendations for all the 56 organisations that come under its scope.

The Government has striven and has achieved in more than full measure. But it will not rest upon its laurels, for there is more to be done...

of Karnataka's progress.

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karnataka information

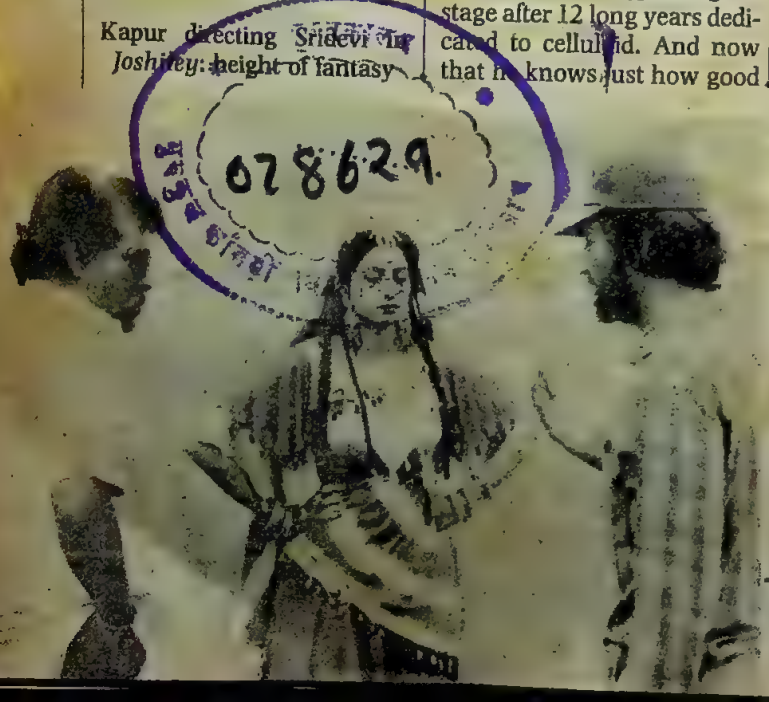
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◆ If Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and wife Shalinitai are caught sneaking into a cinema hall to see a matinee some day, it won't be surprising—for their charming daughter Vijaya, who is part-time dancer and full-time beautician, has now decided to become an actress as well. She will star in her first Marathi film called *Mugli Jhali Ho* meaning 'a girl is born', but the budding starlet confesses that she does not know much about acting. "I'm doing it just for fun," she smiled.



Patil: acting's fun

◆ When Shekhar Kapur disappeared for four months, rumours were that the brilliant young director of *Masoom* had gone bananas. Who else but a mad man would take Sunny Deol, Sridevi, 13 horses and an entire film crew to a god-forsaken place like Ladakh—and to make a fantasy film, at that. Well, Shekhar Kapur is back,



Kapur directing Sridevi in *Joshiley*: height of fantasy

his film *Joshiley* almost complete and if insiders are to be believed, this big-budget, big-star western is going to shake the Hindi screen like nothing else before. "The whole industry thought I was crazy," grinned Kapur who stubbornly insisted on getting the spectacular, mysterious moonscape of Ladakh into his film, "now I'll have the last laugh."

◆ The slighted world of Indian theatre has at last acquired a 70 mm presence—big, bold, large-as-life Amjad Khan himself. The heavy-



Amjad: coming home

weight villain became quite a public hero when he first thundered into the cuckoo's nest in *Chun Chun Karti Ayee Chidiya*, a translation of the Jack Nicholson starrer and then appeared in Joe Orton's *Loot*, both adapted for the stage by brother Imtiaz. "Returning to the theatre is to me like returning home," said Amjad who is appearing on stage after 12 long years dedicated to celluloid. And now that he knows just how good



Dipti: artistic passion

that applause sounds, he has no intentions of leaving. Welcome home Gabbar Singh!

◆ What a richness of life in Amrita Sher-Gil's closet. Here was a woman who yearned for sensation, drove men to insanity and died a mysterious, tragic death—perfect fodder for a film, and who should steal it but Dipti Naval Jha. Before anyone else could scoop it up, the actress quickly purchased rights to Iqbal Singh's freshly released biography on the great painter. "I have been interested in the artist ever since I did my art course in New York," said Dipti who is tentatively planning to do an Amrita Sher-Gil for the screen. "Besides, it's a once-in-a-lifetime role." Well, even if Madame Jha can bring all of Sher-Gil's passion and honesty into her film, it would be still more interesting to see how much of it makes it through the censors' scissors.



Newly-weds Ameeta and Syed Modi: love match

◆ They first saw each other through a net, then Syed Modi started courting Ameeta Kulkarni—and now the country's top badminton players have become man and wife, at last. "We are keen on playing as much badminton as we can before settling down," Kulkarni had announced last year, but seems the 22-year-olds couldn't wait. After a triumphant victory in the Lucknow International recently, Syed and Ameeta decided to break the little secret to the world—that their love match was already made. But the game, it seems, will go on.

—Compiled by SIMRAN BHARGAVA

SIGN POSTS

◆ **Stepped down:** J.R.D. Tata, as chairman of the Jamshedpur-based Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) after 46 years at the helm of the Tata empire's flagship. He is succeeded by TISCO vice-chairman and managing director, Russi Mody.

◆ **Awarded:** Magsaysay award winner Ela Bhatt, the 1984 Right To Livelihood Prize given by the Swedish parliament for her work with Gujarat-based Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) which she founded. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 1.5 lakh.

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